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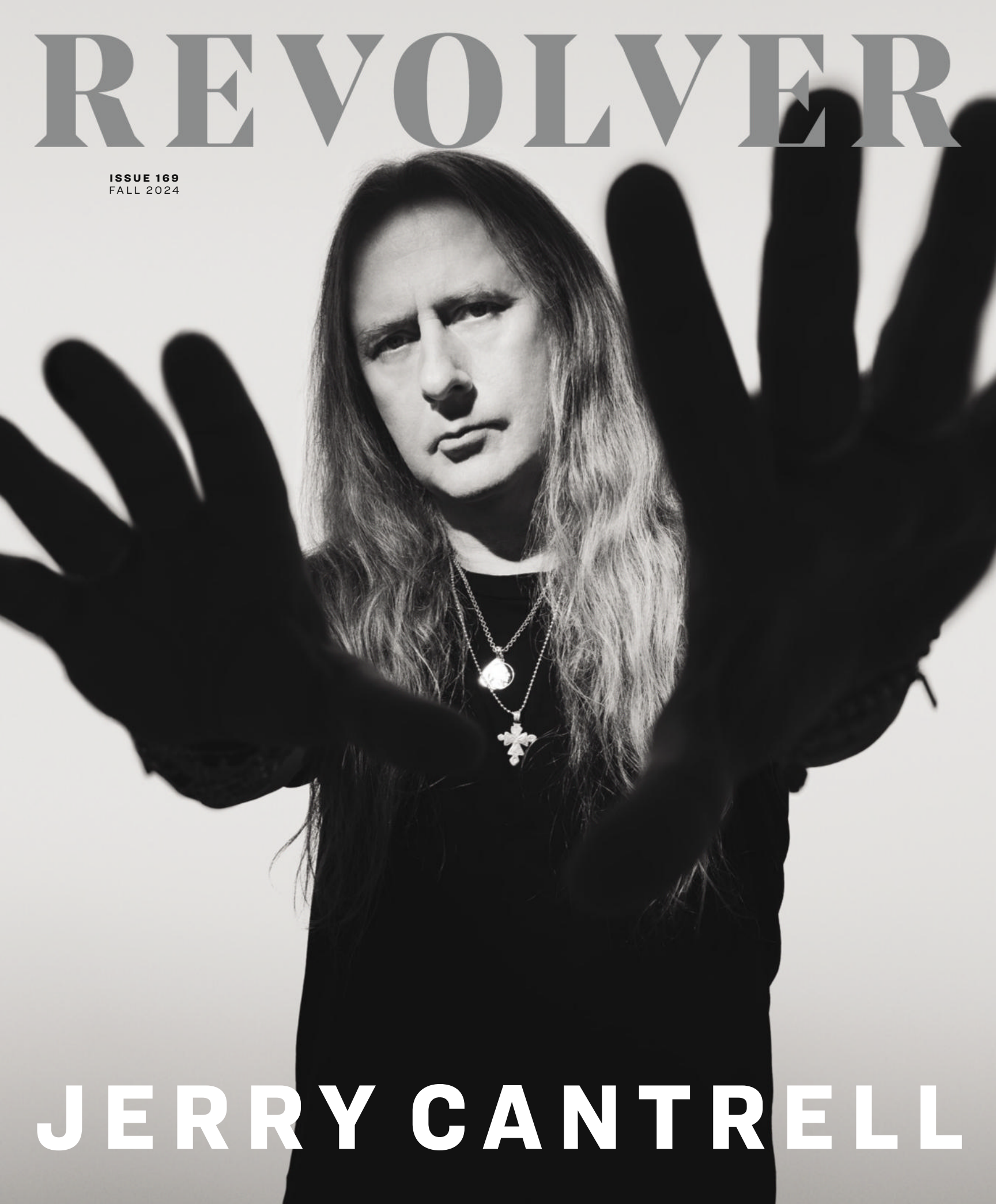

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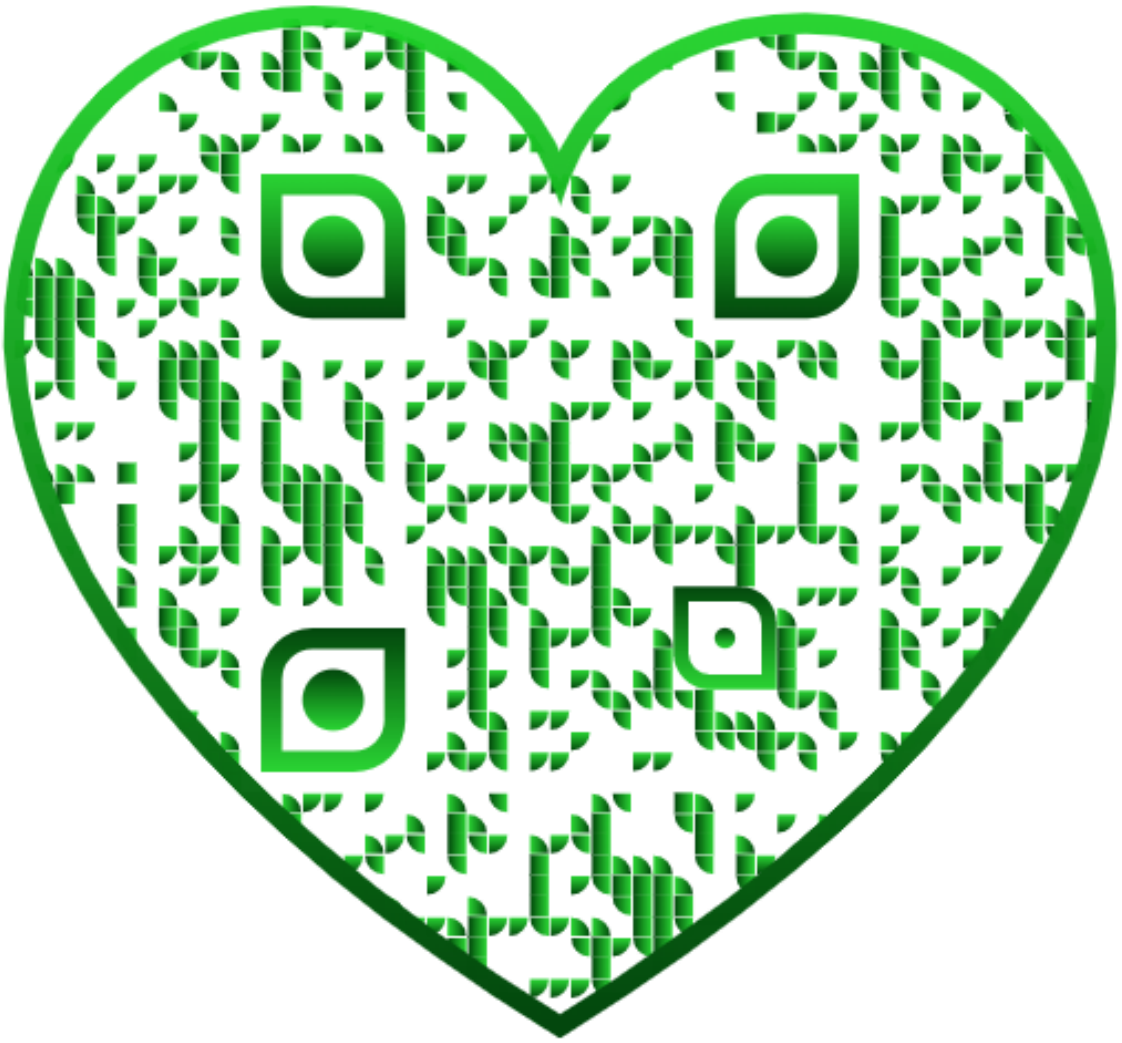

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FALL 2024

MAYHEM

Bad Omens // Parkway Drive // Architects // Jinjer // Poppy
Kittie // Seven Hours After Violet // HANABIE. // + Many More

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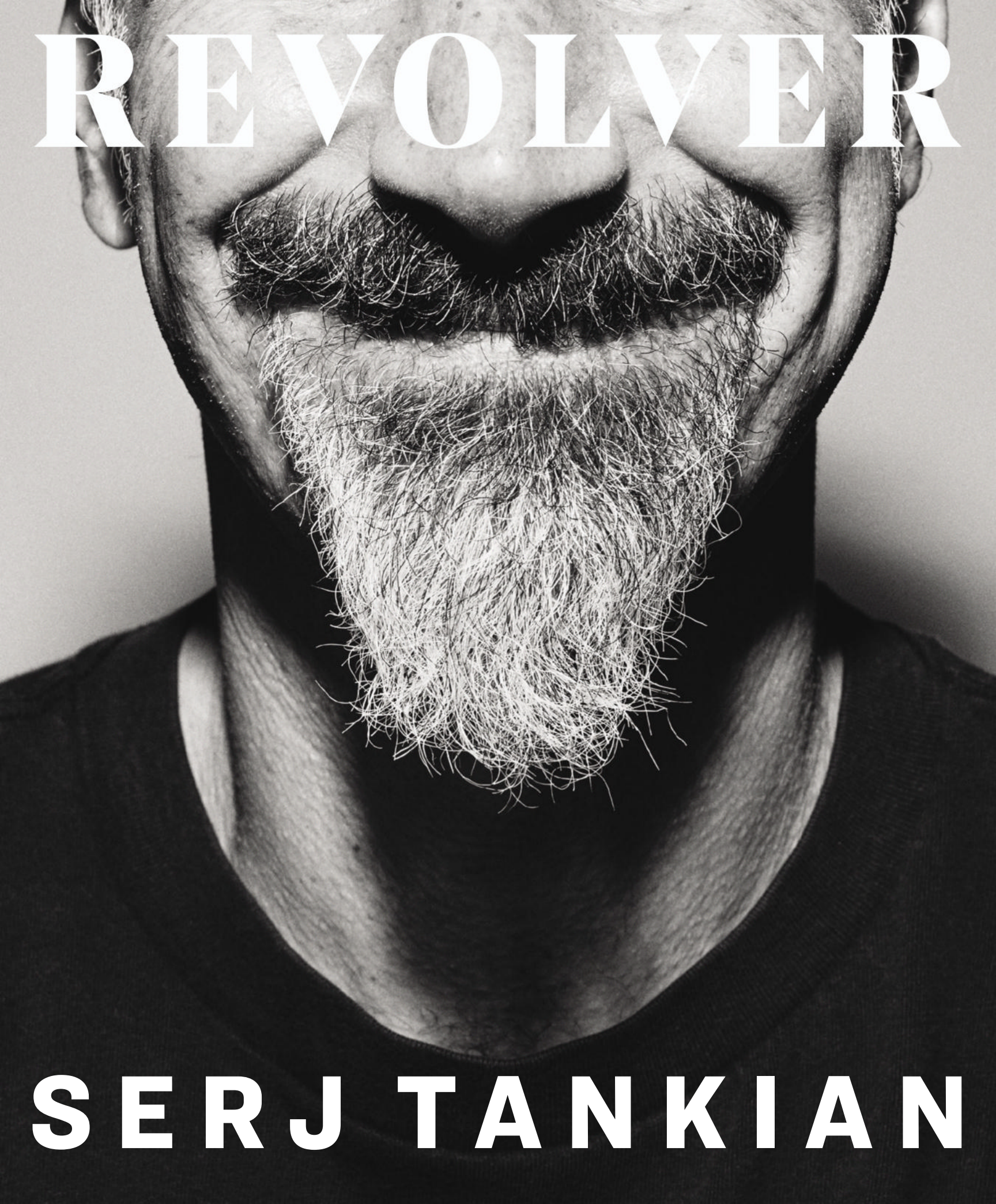
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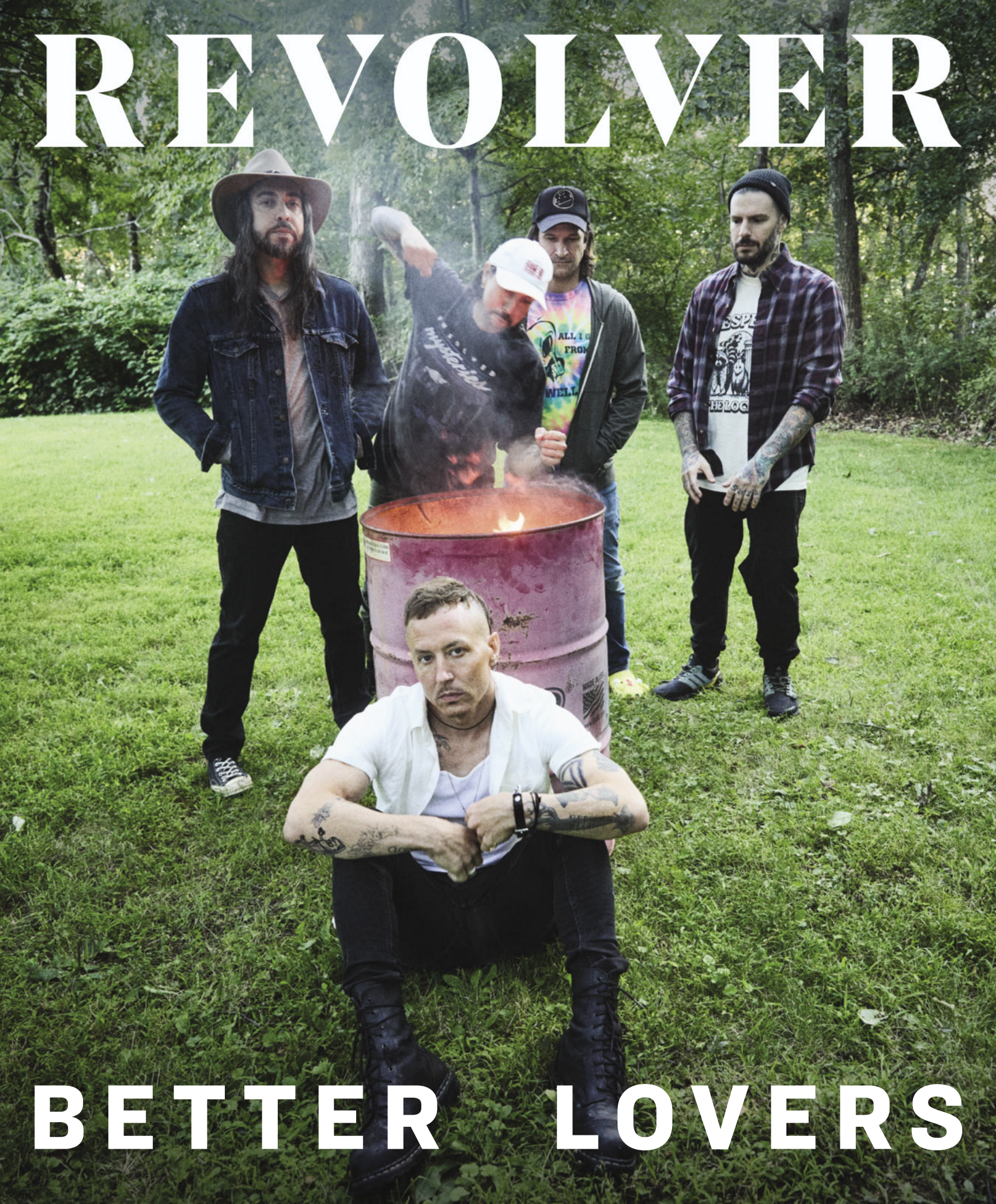

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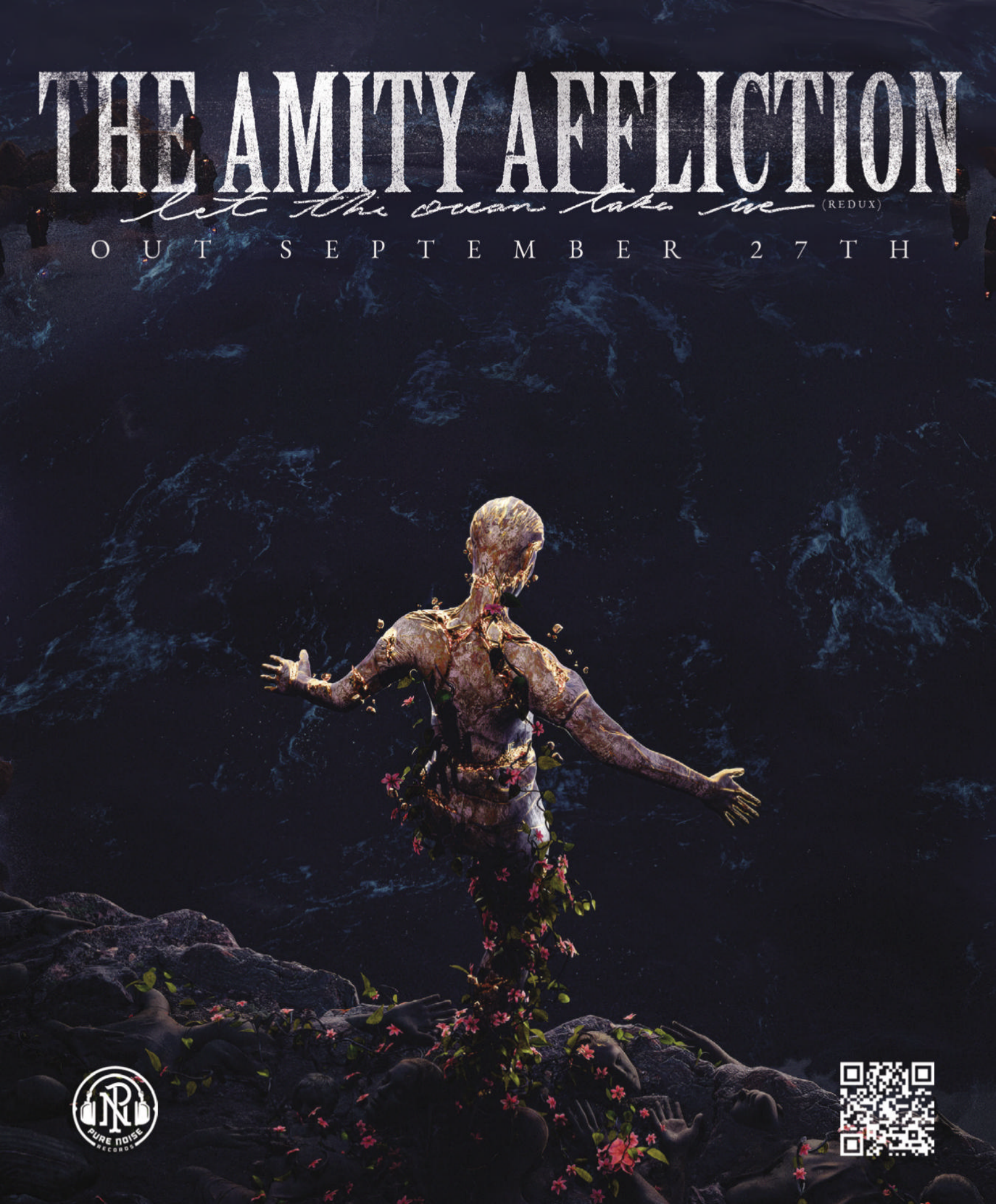
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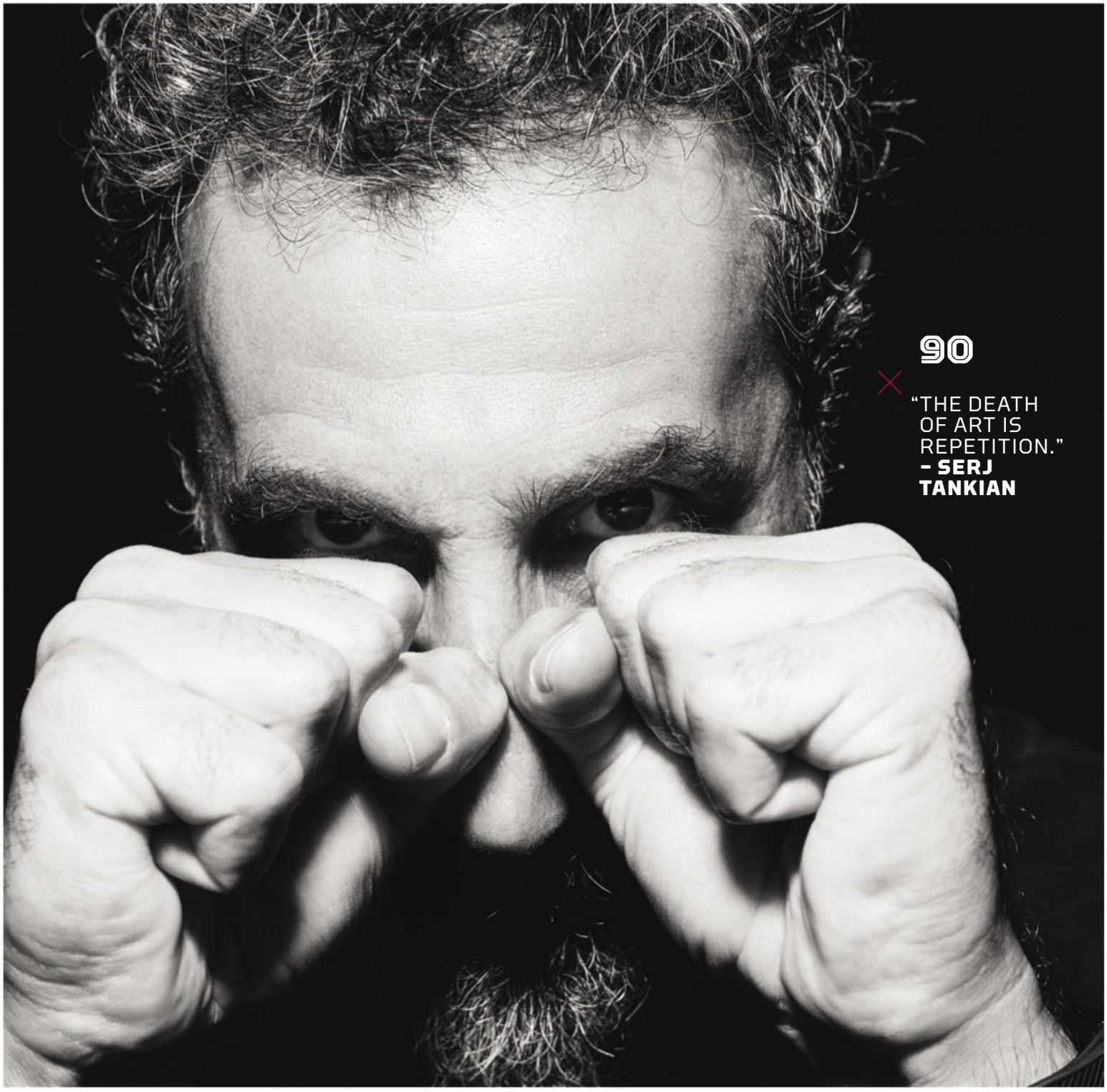

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"THE DEATH OF ART IS REPETITION." **– SERJ TANKIAN**

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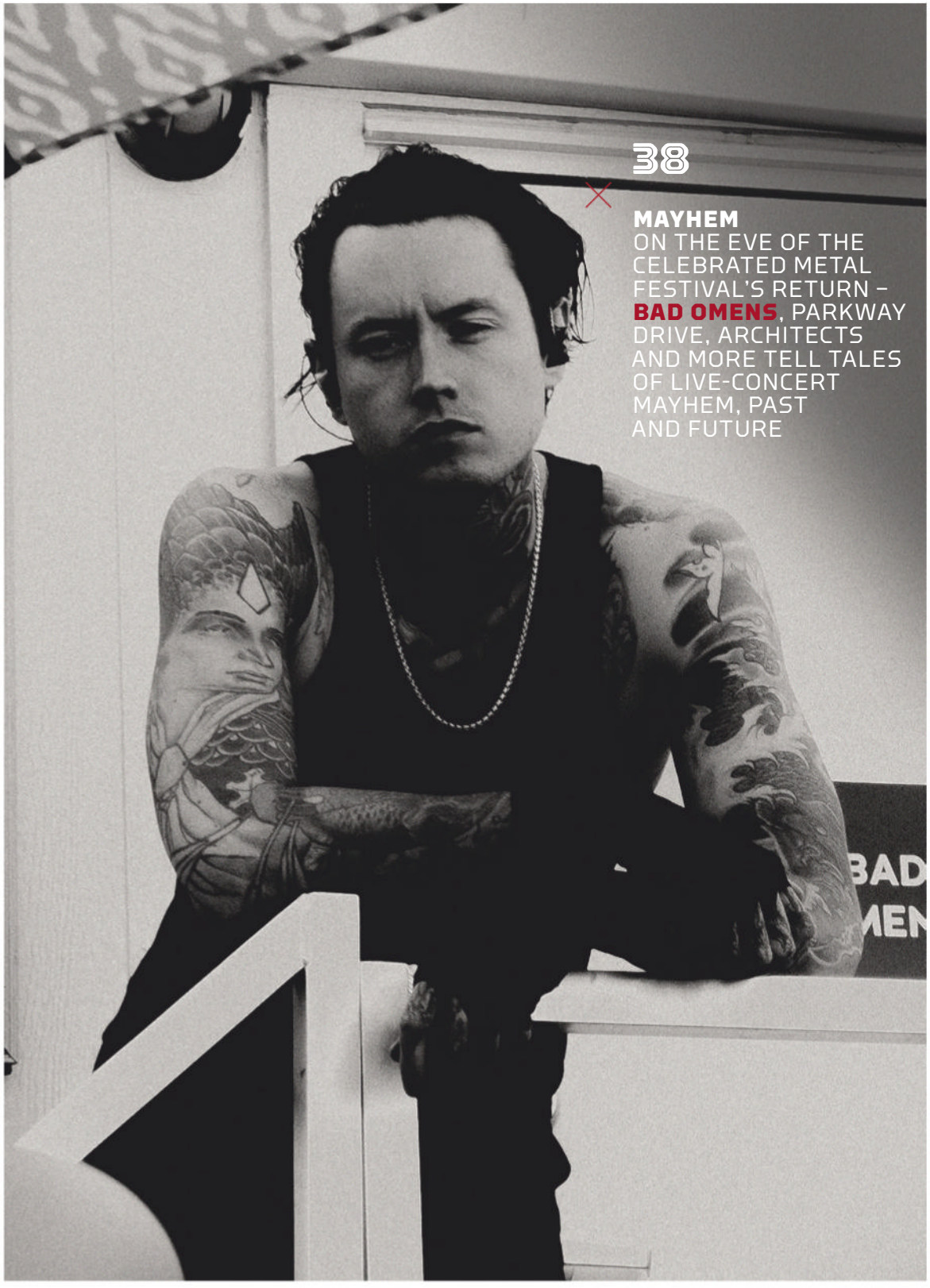

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I WOULD BE REMISS IF I DIDN'T GIVE A SHOUT-OUT IN THIS ISSUE TO THE MOST METAL moment of the year, and in fact, the most metal moment of many years: Gojira rocking the fucking Olympics.

I'll always remember the first time I heard Gojira. It was in 2005. I had just joined the staff of *Revolver* and was in the office, throwing promo CDs in the stereo system to try and find some good shit for us to cover. Out of the pile, I picked up a promo from the French label Listenable Records for an album called *From Mars to Sirius* by a band called Gojira. I popped it in, cranked the volume, and after some eerie whale sounds, the massive opening riff of "Ocean Planet" came in. I almost fell out of my chair. Holy shit, this is fucking awesome, I thought.

After my first listen to the full album, I was a die-hard fan. A few months later, ahead of the record's U.S. release, I set up an interview with Joe Duplantier — which, if it wasn't Gojira's first-ever U.S. interview, it was certainly one of the first. The dude couldn't have been cooler, nicer or humbler. Between the music and the niceness, Gojira instantly became *the* band I was gonna champion. I remember, around that time, Brann from Mastodon was hanging out in the *Revolver* office and asked me what band he should check out. "Gojira," I said without hesitation. "They kinda sound like ISIS crossed with Morbid Angel." I'm not saying I made it happen, but Gojira *has* gone on to tour with Mastodon many times.

From playing with Mastodon to opening for Metallica, I've seen Gojira do many great things since I first heard "Ocean Planet." But I never could have imagined seeing them play the Olympics, and not just play it, but do so amid the most epically metal production ever — with blood, fire, a castle, a full-sized ship, an opera singer, and the beheaded Marie Antoinette. Holy fucking shit.

Even better yet, the whole world was watching. I know my phone and social media immediately blew up, with even friends and family who don't listen to metal, reaching out: "Did you watch the Olympic opening ceremony?" "That was amazing!" "Who is that band?"

We metalheads don't always get the respect we deserve, and from the Grammys to the Super Bowl, metal bands don't usually get invited to appear on the biggest stages. This was a moment for metalheads everywhere to feel proud and to feel hopeful. As Jerry Cantrell says in this issue of watching Gojira at the Olympics: "They're cool with heavy metal? Maybe times are changing for the better."

Or as Joe himself roared in the performance: "Let's rejoice, good times will come."

Brandon Geist
Chief Content Officer

REVOLVER

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Seven Hours After Violet, 2024

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Seven Hours After Violet, (from left) Josh Johnson, Shavo Odadjian, Taylor Barber, Morgoth Beatz and Alejandro Aranda

Seven Hours After Violet

System of a Down's Shavo Odadjian returns to his roots with a heavy new supergroup

TEXT Gregory Adams PHOTOGRAPHY Zack Perez

SHAVO ODADJIAN KNOWS HIS WAY AROUND SPECIAL HERBS.

Though *Revolver* connects with the System of a Down bassist to discuss Seven Hours After Violet — his deathcore-and-more-inspired new band featuring members of Left to Suffer and Winds of Plague — a spicy side story involves the scrumptious, pan-seared steaks the Los Angeles-based musician has been flexing on his Instagram account lately, too. We know there's habanero, rosemary, garlic and thyme involved, but Odadjian won't fully detail the "secret rub" he puts on the meat, other than the fact that he found it somewhere in Arizona. Odadjian also admits that he owes his new bandmates a home-cooked meal. But then again, as the co-owner of cannabis lifestyle brand 22Red, he's already keeping them plenty spiced.

"That's the one thing about being a friend of mine: There is no shortage of herbs, because it's what I do," he explains of maintaining 22Red's top-shelf line of potent flowers, concentrates, pre-rolls and vape pens. Odadjian takes pride in his seasoned tastebuds — he quality checks each strain himself — but he's also happy to enlist the discerning palates of his many bandmates for official business.

"I use them as my testers sometimes," he says. "I'll give [Winds of Plague and SHAV guitarist] Morgoth [Beatz] four different jars, like, 'Smoke this for a little while. Let me know what you think.' Also, when I get concentrates and we're testing those out, Daron [Malakian] from System is a really good judge for that."

It's fair to say that Odadjian's music career has also relied on the inspired blending of his and his friends' expert tastes. As a co-founding member of System of a Down, he played a crucial part in helping that bombastic foursome define the nu-metal era and become one of its most eclectic and biggest-selling acts. Though they occasionally reunite — this summer, for instance, they headlined a massive concert to 50,000 people at San Francisco's Golden Gate Park — outside of a pair of new singles in 2020, System's musical output has been nonexistent since their last full-length release, 2005's *Hypnotize*.

In System's relative absence, Odadjian has kept his creativity up over the years while collaborating with Wu-Tang Clan's RZA as experimental hip-hop faction AcHoZeN, and more recently while exploring distorted trap textures in North Kingsley. But Seven Hours After Violet — whose self-titled debut drops this fall on Odadjian's

"I'll always be System of a Down. Nothing's going to take the place of that. But I need to work, and I was missing this in my life." — Shavo Odadjian

new 1336 Records, an imprint of Sumerian Records — is the first time in a long while that the bassist has fully thrown himself into a metal-forward project. Funnily enough, 22Red is quite integral to how Odadjian put together this latest — and certainly heaviest — System side project yet.

A 2022 company event held at an L.A. hookah lounge is where Odadjian first met Michael Montoya, a.k.a. Morgoth Beatz, the Grammy-nominated producer who works with Polyphia, Suicide Silence, Machine Gun Kelly and others — at least when he's not slinging brutal deathcore riffs in Winds of Plague. The musicians instantly hit it off, and when Odadjian later stopped by Morgoth's SoCal home studio to jam, their bond was solidified. The chugging sonic interplay was so intense and infectious that they immediately brainstormed how to put their music out into the world.

"Originally [we planned to] write all the music instrumentally, and then every song would have a feature on it — kind of like the DJ Khaled of metal," Odadjian explains. "I was thinking one song Serj [Tankian, SOAD's frontman] would do. Maybe one song with Spencer [Charnas] from Ice Nine Kills, or Corey [Taylor]. Just cool vocalists I admire. That's why in the early days of me talking about [the project], I said Jonathan Davis was involved. We were going to bring him on, but it didn't happen on this record."

The logistics of performing live with that kind of all-star roster is what made Odadjian reconsider his approach. That's when Morgoth introduced the bassist to the dynamically disgusting sounds of Taylor Barber, the multifaceted vocal powerhouse for Atlanta deathcore bruisers Left to Suffer.

"We sent him a track, and then he did vocals in his bedroom and sent it back. Bro, this guy's voice gave me chills," Odadjian recalls.

From there, Morgoth tapped Winds of Plague's Josh Johnson to play drums, and recruited guitarist-vocalist Alejandro Aranda, a onetime *American Idol* contestant with a sincere love of metal, the voice of an angel and a guitar virtuoso's skillset. With the lineup locked, they then had to come up with a band name. Someone suggested they be billed as a Shavo Odadjian solo project, but the bassist quickly vetoed that — thinking it would seem egotistical, and a bit comical. "Like, if my name was Paul, would I want *Paul* on there," he says through a lightly exasperated laugh.

Somewhere along the way, a compromise was made to drop the "o" off "Shavo," and reverse-engineer that into an acronym: Seven Hours After Violet.

The quintet bounced between Morgoth's place and Odadjian's North Hollywood 1336 Studios to write and record the 11-song *Seven Hours After Violet*. Their bond was cemented by the immersive experience — most of the band slept in the studios during the three-week creation process. "I've been doing this 30-plus years, and it's not easy to develop strong relationships so fast," Odadjian marvels of the group's internal dynamic. "Every member is so sweet and so willing to put into the pot. No egos anywhere. So, we became close."

There are stylistic touchstones between SHAV and SOAD — take the panicked dance-metal feel of the newer band's "Alive" compared to something like System's dizzying *Toxicity* classic "Deer Dance." That's only natural. Odadjian says it's a vibe that's coded into his DNA. But the bassist also stresses that he wanted SHAV's genetics to mutate well beyond his origins: "Anything that sounded *too* much like System, I would say, 'We're not doing this.'"

Album opener "Paradise" sets the heavy precedent for SHAV's new era, as its deathcore-stomped sections smash up against glitched-out production techniques. Barber bounces between a thick-necked rasp, bestial gutturals and a few pig-squeal-psycho highs, while Aranda adds surprising sensitivity with his vocal section. Elsewhere, the record balances Odadjian's "crazy-fast" songs with violet-incandescent nu-ballads, electro-broken twitchiness, slow-crawl metal chunkiness and more. It's a wide range of sounds that reflects the many interests of a multigenerational musical unit.

"They look up to me … and I look up to them, bro, because they keep me young," Odadjian reveals. "If I need any advice about what's going on right now, I turn to Morgoth and them. Like, 'Does this sound modern — or am I the old fart coming up with a riff that might be outdated?'"

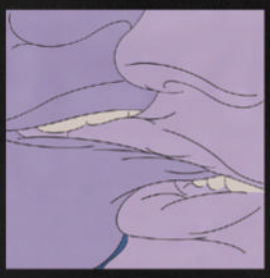
Seven Hours After Violet, 2024

Odadjian has also played Seven Hours After Violet's record for most of his brothers in System. Tankian gave the songs a thumbs-up while they were listening to them together during a car ride, and drummer John Dolmayan was equally supportive, telling Odadjian to "follow your heart" with the project.

"I mean, I'll always be System of a Down," the bassist admits, adding that he has a phone full of song ideas earmarked for System, should they ever return to album-writing mode. "Nothing's going to take the place of that. But because System works so few and far between, *I* need to work. I'm always driven, and I was missing this in my life."

Odadjian's excitement over banging out heavy tunes with his new bandmates is undeniable, and the momentum behind Seven Hours After Violet is only picking up. For instance, SHAV will bring their deathcore to thousands of music fans at one of this year's most-anticipated metal events: the relaunching of the Mayhem Festival in San Bernardino, California this October. It's a big move, but they're more than ready for the action.

"It's *already* a moving juggernaut," he says of Seven Hours After Violet business thus far, noting that a handful of tracks are already in the tank for a second full-length. Despite SHAV's members also being pulled in different directions by their other projects, Odadjian confirms he's in this for the long haul. "All my heart went into this," he says. "It was an amazing thing to be able to do what I love, to do what I do best, and to do what I do easily. It's literally a no-brainer to do this."



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TEXT
Emma Wilkes

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Calva Louise

The band members hail from multiple countries. Their retro-futuristic sci-fi vision spans multiple worlds.

CALVA LOUISE WILL NEVER PLAY A HOMETOWN SHOW. That's because, technically, they don't have one.

The trio's members each hail from vastly different corners of the world. Vocalist-guitarist Jess Allanic is from Venezuela, bassist Alizon Taho from France and drummer Ben Parker from New Zealand — and they convened thousands of miles from their respective countries in the United Kingdom. Each lured there by the perennially rich music scene, they met in London and formed Calva Louise in 2016. Music quickly became their universal language.

Over three albums, 2019's *Rhinoceros*, 2021's *Euphoric* and last year's *Over the Threshold*, Calva Louise have refined their distinct, multicultural sound — an exciting mix of electronica-flecked punk, nu-metal and post-hardcore — which has earned them pockets of dedicated fans all over the world. They've already checked off bucket-list festival slots across the globe, from the U.K.'s Download Festival and Germany's Vainstream Rockfest to U.S. favorites Sonic Temple and Welcome to Rockville. But now, something even bigger is brewing — and their sky-high vision has them poised for an even greater expansion.

This year, the band dropped two explosive new singles, "La Corriente" and "Under the Skin," which saw their sound metamorphose into something heightened, more daring and notably heavier. With their fourth album expected to drop in 2025, all doors are open for Calva Louise. And, as a testament to their grit, they're writing their own future without a label bankrolling the project.

This, of course, presents its own financial and logistical challenges for Calva Louise — but the silver lining is their total artistic freedom. There's nobody behind them telling them, "No." The band's independence has allowed them to stride ahead and develop aspects of their creative world that their previous label had frowned upon: from leaning into heavier sounds to expanding the unique sci-fi lore that underpins their music — the latter stemming from a narrative that Allanic first developed when she was just 10 years old.

"It started when I was still in Venezuela and it's really connected to my personal experiences," she explains of the surreal tale, which begins as an origin story of the band before blasting off into a multi-world epic (a plot Calva Louise further flesh out in their graphic novel *Rhinoceros*). "The band is named after the main character, Louise, and Calva means 'bald' — but it's also linked to a play called *The Bald Soprano* [by Eugène Ionesco,] which is about the absurdity of language. The story [is about] this world, and then there's another world where we have doubles — and all these forces are out to keep us apart from our doubles."

It's heady stuff, no doubt, but Allanic believes the storyline is a crucial element to why Calva Louise are resonating with such a wide-ranging global audience. "People connect more with the story than with us as individuals," she says. "I always felt it was hard for people to connect with our *personal* stories. We don't have family here. We didn't go to school or university here. When Alizon got here, he couldn't speak English. We learned the language to be part of the music scene."

"We each have a lot of different influences, based on where we were and what we were listening to growing up," says Parker of Calva Louise's collective musical bedrock, which includes Muse, System of a Down and Queens of the Stone Age, as well as Latin American hip-hop, metal, folk and alt artists Molotov, Calle 13, El Cuarteto de Nos and Simón Díaz. "I think it translates into the music and makes it a little bit different."

Calva Louise, (from left) Ben Parker, Jess Allanic and Alizon Taho

Calva Louise's eclectic sound and fantastical world-building are helping them slice through cultural barriers — and naturally there's a piece of their home nations' music in everything they create. Nowhere is that more evident than the songs Allanic writes in Spanish. But regardless of what language the singer is employing, the emotion she conveys with her vocals is still capable of transcending linguistic differences.

In fact, Calva Louise are all about transcendence: from spanning cultural divides to overcoming the challenges of being independent operators. Without a label's backing, they're DIY to the core — and are proud of the punk-as-fuck resourcefulness that they've cultivated over the years. They record in their own bedrooms and kitchens, build their own equipment and create their own music videos, with Allanic acting as both director and editor. They've even schooled themselves in CGI, which helped them bring the stunning sci-fi scenes of "Under the Skin" from page to screen. And whether they're crafting cerebral, digital expressions or devising lo-fi creative solutions, Calva Louise aren't afraid to get their hands dirty.

"I needed a keyboard that I could slide away so there's no barrier between me and the audience," Allanic recalls of one DIY project, "and Alizon used wood, skateboard bearings and metal to build this [sliding stand]." A video of the singer playing Taho's rather genius invention later went viral on TikTok.

"Everything you see onstage is literally just made in the garage," Taho adds. "We don't have the resources to buy all these materials and gear, but we still want to offer an interesting experience for everyone that comes to the show."

So far, Calva Louise's ascent has been a gradual, slow-burn rise that's showing no signs of cooling — and they wouldn't have it any other way. "It's always helped never to have hype, because there's less pressure in terms of delivering something," Allanic concludes. "We've never had to prove ourselves — but we prove ourselves to each other."

Over the Threshold, 2023; *Euphoric*, 2021

03

Bilmuri

Johnny Franck's wild ride from Attack Attack! to Sleep Token-approved country-metalcore

TEXT John Hill
PHOTOGRAPHY Julie Jackson

SIPPING BEERS ON A RIDING LAWN MOWER. HAILING THE BUCKEYE STATE. Aching about failed relationships amidst a flurry of massive country choruses, fiery fiddle solos and bouncy metal breakdowns. Muscles popping out of sleeveless American flag shirts, and a peak-U.S.A., go-for-the-gold mindset of "cranking hog." Welcome to the weird world of Bilmuri — the countrified metalcore solo project of songwriter Johnny Franck.

On paper, country and metalcore are two genres that should be treated like church and state. Only a true 'coreman like Franck can make them work together. As a teenager, the Ohio-based musician was an early member of Attack Attack! and helped bring "crabcore" to the Warped Tour masses. Fatigued by the scene's nonstop tour cycle and carbon-copy bands, Franck eventually left Attack Attack! after their 2010 self-titled album to focus on becoming a producer. "I got so fucking sick of it, every band coming in and wanting the exact same thing," Franck says today of the metalcore sound that dominated the early 2010s.

For the next few years, Franck kept busy with production work and released singles with the indie duo the March Ahead. Bilmuri was born in 2016 — after he had a simple, but striking songwriting realization: "I can take a shitty song and make it sound dope, but what if you had a *dope* song and made it sound even better?"

This led Franck to take a hyper-pop songwriting approach with Bilmuri, meshing metalcore with the best parts of different genres: from anime-inspired chill-beat-core to hell-yeah-brother country bangers. He's also adopted a super productive approach to the project. In the past eight years, Franck has released a staggering 14 Bilmuri full-lengths. The most recent is this year's *AMERICAN MOTOR SPORTS* — their major-label debut for Columbia Records — which serves up twangy metalcore heaters like the earworm "BETTER HELL (Thicc boi)" and the saxophone-tastic "BLINDSIDED." As Bilmuri's singer, songwriter, guitarist and overall mastermind, Franck cartwheels on the tightrope between fun and funny — but is careful to not lean too far into the latter. He doesn't want Bilmuri to become a comedy act. "I would never sacrifice the seriousness of a song to make some sort of gag," Franck says. "All the gags are usually sounds, like the Taco Bell bell."

As a testament to how much Bilmuri's stock has risen over the past few years, the band was invited to play BABYMETAL's FOX_FEST in Tokyo this May, and later this year, they'll be joining Sleep Token as direct support for the masked phenom's U.K. and European tour. So what is behind this strange magic that allows Bilmuri to successfully merge contradictory genres — and catch the attention of some of heavy music's most forward-thinking and popular outfits? We caught up with Franck in between tractor rides to find out.

YOU'RE GOING ON TOUR WITH SLEEP TOKEN, WHICH MIGHT SEEM LIKE A RANDOM PAIRING. BUT WHEN YOU LOOK AT THE SURPRISING WAYS BOTH BANDS MERGE HEAVY MUSIC WITH POP, IT STARTS TO MAKES MORE SENSE...

JOHNNY FRANCK I agree that both Sleep Token and I have pop sensibilities. I mean, that's what I listen to. Pop, to me, is the gladiatorial combat of who can make the best song — and it's cutthroat, it's competitive. I like studying it because these are the best people at music. What's cool, too, is I'm getting to write with a lot of these pop writers now, and we have a great time. I don't know if [Vessel] writes everything, but if he wanted to get in the room with a bunch of Swedish dudes, he could.

AMERICAN MOTOR SPORTS, 2024

MY WIFE AND I WERE RECENTLY DRIVING THROUGH RURAL WISCONSIN, AND WE THREW ON *AMERICAN MOTOR SPORTS*. I FEEL LIKE THAT DRIVE MADE ME GET THAT RECORD ON A DEEPER LEVEL. That's perfect dude. Wisconsin's countryside is beautiful. I'm glad you enjoy that part of the Midwest, and I'm glad people hear the Midwest in the album — 'cause that was one of my goals. I want people to be proud that they're from the Midwest. I am — I love it here. Everyone from Ohio is fucking proud to be from Ohio.

I DON'T THINK IT'S EVER DISCUSSED HOW OHIO HAS THE HIGHEST BATTING AVERAGE WHEN IT COMES TO PRODUCING METALCORE BANDS. Dude, it's crazy. My theory is that we all hung out with each other and swapped ideas and stuff, like, "Oh, that thing they do is cool." And then they do the same with you, and everyone's kind of like sharing information because we're playing shows all the time. Then Attack got big, and then Miss May I got huge as well because we're all sharing everything. My other theory is there's nothing else to do here.

***AMERICAN MOTOR SPORTS* IS INTERESTING TO ME. I THINK IN METALCORE THERE'S THIS MODE OF OVERCOMPLICATING SONGS WITH SYNTHS AND STUFF, BUT I GET THE SENSE YOU WANTED TO SIMPLIFY EVERYTHING.** Oh absolutely. What's cool with this record is that I spent so much time on it, and I really went back to square one. I felt like I got a little too "artistic" on my last album [2022's *GOBLIN HOURS*], like, I'm gonna make *art*, dude. And then people were like, Well, we're not gonna listen to it. I had an ego death there where I was like, OK, people aren't going to consume *everything* that I do. It has to be a relationship. So, I challenged myself on this record to only write songs with a guitar and vocals — no amp on the guitar, just straight into the computer and no effects on anything. If it sounds cool with just a guitar, then it'll sound cool when you add all the other instruments into it.

THIS IS ALSO THE FIRST TIME I'VE HEARD COUNTRY BLENDED WITH METALCORE IN A WAY THAT WASN'T MEANT TO MAKE FUN OF IT. IT'S CLEAR YOU'RE A FAN, AND NOT JUST TRYING TO DO A BIT. The instrumentation of country music is my favorite. I think what turns people off is the beer-and-trucks talk in country, which is fine, 'cause I love it. But if you just listen to the instrumentals and how masterful the players are, I think you could really get into that. Pedal steel is cool, fiddles are awesome. All these instruments are sweet. My dad was in a bluegrass band growing up, so I was around it my whole life. I wanted to show respect — so if a country fan listened to it, they're like, OK, he's *respecting* country music.

YOU'VE BEEN GRINDING IN MUSIC AND EVOLVING YOUR SOUND FOR CLOSE TO TWO DECADES NOW, AND IT SEEMS LIKE THE FRUITS OF YOUR LABOR ARE TRULY PAYING OFF. I be eating the fruits, dude. [*Laughs*] I'm enjoying the wave, for sure. It's cool, sometimes things you work hard on don't do well and things you don't work hard on *do* — like the song that you spent 15 minutes on does better than the one you spent 15 hours on. It's nice to see that people are really enjoying it. I think this is the best thing I've ever done, and everyone so far has been like, "Yes, we think that too." With Bilmuri, I want to bring heavy music to the masses. I want to show an arena of people what a breakdown is — and for them to see a crowd of our fans going off in the pit. My goal is to play a pop-music fest, a country fest and a metal fest in the same year. But we'll take whatever people want, man. I'm just happy to be playing music.

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04

TEXT Emma Madden
PHOTOGRAPHY Katja Ogrin

Lowen

Nina Saeidi was born in exile from Iran. Using ancient sounds and modern metal, she's connecting with her homeland's rich culture – and confronting the Islamic regime's injustices.

IMAGINE, IF YOU CAN, THAT THE LAND WHERE YOU came from was forbidden to you. The place where all your ancestors lived, right down to the first person who bore your family name, bolted shut. If you dared to enter, you'd face imprisonment — or more likely death. Your life a permanent state of exile.

This is the condition that Nina Saeidi has spent her entire life trying to reckon with. Due to the Islamic Republic of Iran's strict laws, Saeidi is forced to live almost 4,000 miles away from her land of provenance. It is now highly illegal for Saeidi — a metal singer born and raised in the U.K., who now fronts the up-and-coming band Lowen — to visit the land where her parents were born, and her extended family still resides.

"I've always been dying to go there, to meet all these people that I'll never get to meet," she says. "It's totally heartbreaking."

Displaced and dispossessed, she transmutes the yearning for her homeland into sorrowful, crushing sounds with Lowen, laying down tahrir (traditional Iranian vocals) over complex progressive metal filled with propulsive rhythms and alternately heavy, heady and doomy guitars.

Speaking with *Revolver* a few months before the release of Lowen's second album, *Do Not Go to War With the Demons of Mazandaran*, Saeidi's state of limbo feels doubled. She's in that strange purgatorial space between album wrap and album release.

"We've no idea what to expect, because it's a bit unusual, isn't it," she says, demurely at first. Then, more accurately: "There's really nothing like it." Saeidi is entirely right: *Do Not Go to War With the Demons of Mazandaran* is a rich and unique concept album that merges ancient Persian tales and sounds with modern metal. The word "uncategorizable" gets bandied around a lot these days, especially in this age of boundary-pushing metal. But it's the only one — at least in Western expression — that can accurately convey how singular this album is.

Sammy Urwin and Justine Jones of U.K. metalcore group Employed to Serve, who keenly signed Lowen to their label Church Road Records last year, irreverently refer to it as "world prog." How else to describe it? It's the total distillation of an ancient world untouched by Western music, the soul song of someone far away from their padlocked home.

Saeidi is apprehensive about how the world will react to the album. She's nervous, she says, because "there's more of me in it." When asked to define who Nina Saeidi is, exactly, she replies: "That's a good question, because I still don't know the answer to that."

Lowen answers that question for her, even if obliquely and highly conceptually. Listen to Saeidi's vocals — the notes that travel far and strong as a river breaking through a valley. They contain every part of the singer: her past, her fight, her shame, her heartache, her displacement, her confusion, her longing.

It was 45 years ago that Saeidi's parents fled Iran during the revolution and settled indefinitely in England. They birthed their daughter into the world on the other side of exile, raising her on Iranian culture in a sleepy southern English village. While she was fluent in Farsi, Saeidi didn't speak a word of English until she was old enough to go to school.

04

Do Not Go to War With the Demons of Mazandaran, 2024; *A Crypt in the Stars*, 2018

On her first day, she discovered she was one of only two non-white people there. At just six years old, she received her first racial slur. "I was bullied very badly for having, you know, 'weird' food in my lunchbox," she recalls. "I would eat olives and hummus way before they became a middle-class food."

The racism she experienced taught her to be wary of her own culture. As a child and preteen, she felt embarrassed whenever her family spoke Farsi around her. "I was trying to hide it, and I was very good at blending in because I had so many years of shame," she says. "It wasn't until I was a teenager and discovered metal that [I found] a place for me to truly express myself."

In metal, she discovered an artform that dabbled in the daring scales of her homeland and gave voice to outsiders. She became an avid reader of metal magazines and found inclusivity to be a common refrain among the bands who were interviewed. This music was for everyone, *especially* those who felt like they didn't belong. Saeidi's discovery of metal also caused her to fall in love with her heritage.

When she was younger, Saeidi's parents would invite friends over on summer evenings to sit around a fire and talk about their home country. As the stars hung brightly in the sky, she listened intently to their tales about the mountains of Kurdistan and Iran, the fresh spring water that ran through their homes and the fish swimming in the clear streams. These stories evoked otherworldly visions for Saeidi, and the far-off land became a mythical place in her imagination.

She saw a very faint mirage of that fantasy when she listened to metal. There were vague Eastern influences across bands like System of a Down and Conquer Divide — but still, something was missing. "I always had this feeling that I would love to hear the sound of what I grew up with, of traditional Iranian music, which is so heavy, so sad, so sorrowful at times," she says. "I always knew it would work well in the heavy-metal context."

She manifested that vision after meeting Shem Lucas, her romantic partner and Lowen's guitarist, at the front row of an Akercocke show in London. When they first began practicing together, Saeidi found that she could, almost inherently, perform the highly complicated tahrir vocals, a yodeling technique used in Persian classic music. She simply opened her mouth and out it came: undulating vocals, miraculous control, the sound of her homeland and heritage. "It's the sound of what's trapped inside of me. It's the connection I'm seeking with my family, with Iran," she says. "It's so much more than just music."

She celebrates her culture's history — and ongoing struggles — on *Do Not Go to War With the Demons of Mazandaran*. The record's themes were mined from one of the fables in *Shahnameh*, the Persian "Book of Kings," which tells the story of a royal corrupted by an agent of evil, who, through his greed and folly, extends his borders into a magical, untouched land. It's a story, both specific and universal, that applies as much to Iran circa 500 B.C. as it does to today's world.

"When I wrote [the album], I had in mind the Islamic regime in Iran: the way they oppress people, their greed and the way they've handled stuff in the country," she says. "It's why I'm here and not where I should be: with my family and the people I love. Instead, I'm out here in this place where I've never felt accepted, where I've never felt like I fit in."

The songs "Corruption on Earth" and "Waging War Against God" are written about the tyrannical ways in which women are treated under the regime, as well as the continuing fight for their rights under the Woman, Life, Freedom movement.

"It's so interesting that 5,000 years ago we were relating to these stories the same way we are relating to them now — they still hold so much commonality with people who lived completely different lives," says Saeidi. "And I think metal is such a great place to explore unity and difference, because people are united through those differences. I find it so much easier to connect with people when I acknowledge that."

Lowen is so much more than a band. It's an ancestral pilgrimage, a metaverse of ancient spaces Saeidi has dreamed up. It's one step closer to home.

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FIXT

Bodysnatcher

Florida deathcore revivalists channel unthinkable personal loss into a powerful new EP

TEXT Jack Rogers
PHOTOGRAPHY Cameron Perry

"FENTANYL MADE ME AN ONLY CHILD."

Bodysnatcher have built a career out of pairing cataclysmic deathcore with raw, ruthless lyrics. But this line is, by far, the most savage and personally devastating in the Florida outfit's entire discography.

Sitting at the heart of "Murder8," the Jamey Jasta-featuring gut punch from the band's new EP *Vile Conduct*, these are six words born from a real-life nightmare that drummer Chris Whited has lived through the past two years. In April 2022, he lost his older brother to an opioid overdose, and one year later, Whited's younger sister succumbed to the same tragic fate.

"It is quite intimidating to write things that are personal to us," Whited admits. "But when people come up to us at shows and say they haven't heard a song that has connected with them in that way before, it makes it even more genuine. We play big dumb-guy heavy music, but then we offer something that people might not expect to get from something so extreme. That's a really cool place to be."

Despite such a heartbreaking path to get here, Bodysnatcher find themselves at an increasingly pivotal, even hopeful, moment in their career. Over the last decade, and across three full-lengths, the band have been refining their approach as they cherry-pick from all their favorite parts of heavy music — every era of hardcore, metalcore and, most prominently, deathcore — and collectively write lyrics that come from personal experience rather than abstract imagination. It's all here in some form, from broken homes to broken hearts. The result is a different level of aggression, channeled through the unpredictable and unrelenting reality of the everyday.

And people are taking notice. Bodysnatcher are rapidly approaching a quarter of a million monthly

Bodysnatcher, (from left) Kyle Carter, Kyle Medina, Chris Whited and Kyle Shope

listeners on Spotify. Match that with playing shows with Spite, Shadow of Intent and Lorna Shore, and they are placing themselves front and center of the current deathcore renaissance. A band to believe in, Bodysnatcher are combining genuine heart, unmistakable hurt and undeniable heaviness — bigger, bolder and better than everyone else.

"We listen to a lot of bands cut from the same cloth, the early Aughts and Nineties hardcore bands where it was all about overcoming hardship," says vocalist Kyle Medina of their influences. "Hatebreed and Terror have stuck around for so long because they have something to cling to. They are speaking about genuine things — and when you have the same [sentiments] in your own arsenal, it definitely helps."

This realness — from Whited's grief to other members' experiences with heartbreak and hardship — directly informed *Vile Conduct*. The new EP ramps up the debauched extreme-metal grit of their prior full-length, 2022's *Bleed-Abide*, and serves as both an outlet for their personal anguish and a platform from which to spew their disdain for the predators and profiteers that trade and relish in pure human suffering. The EP is punishing, powerful and poignant and will stick with you long after the last bruising, steel-toe-capped breakdown has faded away.

"*Vile Conduct* is about people being fucked up and people being shitty," Whited explains. "No matter where you are in life, there are always going to be shitty people who do shitty things, and there's nothing you can do about it. They run everything. Everything is based on greed, and if a profit is made, they will make it, no matter the consequence."

From the unrelenting darkness of "Infested," written about guitarist Kyle Carter's battle with depression, to the tear-stained devastation of "Say Goodbye," a damning callout to "the cancer industry" framed through a conversation Carter had with his mother when she was re-diagnosed and given just months to live — these aren't easy listens by any means. Throw in "Confession," a track that includes snippets from a call made to Whited by the person who sold his brother the fentanyl that he overdosed on — someone who was considered to be one of his brother's best friends — and *Vile Conduct* becomes even more crushing.

In the past, Bodysnatcher's music would usually provide a glimmer of hope peeking through the gray clouds, a reminder that you can persevere — but no such light appears here. There is no answer to what they have been through, and that's OK. More than anything, their current mission is to let people know that they aren't alone in their sorrow.

"If a band gives an 'answer,'" says Whited, "the answer is never going to be the same for everyone…"

"Life is unpredictable," Medina interjects.

"We are just here to express real-life feelings from real-life things," continues Whited. "They happen to everyone else, too, and we want people to know that they don't need to hide it. Everybody goes through it: You're not the only one, and it's OK."

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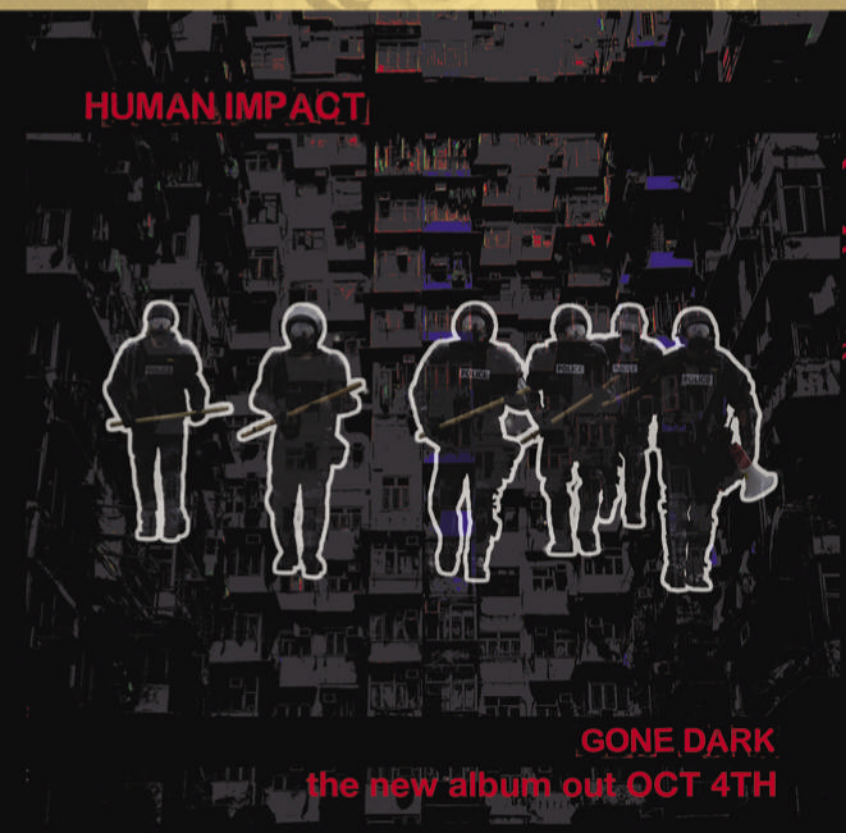

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VANGUARD

Jerry Cantrell, 2024

REBELS, INNOVATORS AND ICONOCLASTS

NICK FANCHER

JERRY CANTRELL

The Alice in Chains icon wants blood.
And with his darker, heavier new solo album, he might just get it.

TEXT **Steve Appleford** PHOTOGRAPHY **Nick Fancher**

THE UNIVERSE OF HEAVY MUSIC IS FOREVER IN FLUX, evolving in surprising ways not just from the rise of new voices, but also in who is listening. A case in point showed itself without much warning at the 2024 Summer Olympics in Paris, where the French metal band Gojira played a prominent role at the opening ceremonies. In July, the band was broadcast around the globe from the medieval Conciergerie palace, where Marie Antoinette was once imprisoned and sentenced to death, to perform the 19th-century French anthem "Ah! Ça Ira" amid pillars of fire and several decapitated Antoinettes singing along from the windows.

It was raging and uncompromising metal, right there on the bank of the Seine river, where the whole world could watch. Back in the United States, guitarist Jerry Cantrell took notice.

"I thought that it was a cool, surprising choice," Cantrell says, then adds with a laugh, "It was also interesting to see Snoop Dogg carrying the torch when they're so concerned with doping. That dude's like the stoner from hell! I love Snoop, but I was like, Holy shit, they're cool with dope now? They're cool with heavy metal? Maybe times are changing for the better."

Not everything requires a revolutionary change, of course. And for Cantrell, the moment of creation is the same as it ever was. These days, that usually means a living-room jam with friends who just happen to be highly accomplished players of hard rock — but the feeling is no different from the hours he used to spend as a young guitarist in a garage or converted bedroom back in Seattle.

The Alice in Chains guitarist can clearly remember his earliest days in rooms like that, "where you'd go over and smoke joints and listen to Rush records and try to play along with your buddy with half a drum kit, and you've got a crappy guitar, trying to learn songs together. I like that element of it."

Now in living rooms at his homes in Los Angeles or Seattle, Cantrell and his group of players will plug into some small amplifiers and pedals, an electronic drum kit, put on headphones and cut loose. Sitting beside him could be any one or more of the usual suspects: bassists Duff McKagan (Guns N' Roses) and Robert Trujillo (Metallica), drummers Gil Sharone (Marilyn Manson, former Dillinger Escape Plan) and Mike Bordin (Faith No More), and composer-guitarist Tyler Bates.

That's how a song that would become "Let It Lie" came to life one day. The completed track — as it appears on Cantrell's new solo album, *I Want Blood* — has a dark and ominous sound that Cantrell now describes as "sludgy as fuck." The song ultimately evolves into an epic of growling guitars, with a prog middle section and big rock solo, and a seething Cantrell vocal: "Everybody has a spell they're under/Beneath a primal urge to fight/Can you see yourself in the other?"

To Cantrell, it was reminiscent of early Soundgarden, a massive, bleak rock tune echoing the earliest days of grunge he knew so well. But it began just as another accidental moment of inspiration between some heavy-rock dudes hanging out in a living room.

"We were just doing a free-form jam, and I stumbled onto that riff," Cantrell recalls. Then Bates responded with something else, "and I reacted to that. He just looked at me like, That's cool."

"I love the next phase, which is going to a kick-ass studio and doing it right," he adds. "But I like keeping it a little lo-fi in the jam phase, in the demo phase. There's something really cool about that to me."

Cantrell is on the phone from the road, heading toward a concert date in Utah. The release of *I Want Blood* is still months away, so the nightly setlist is filled mostly with songs from his three previous solo records and various Alice in Chains classics, plus the new single, "Vilified." He just woke up a little while ago, but is eager to talk about his new album, which features another all-star cast of musicians, much like 2021's *Brighten*.

That record had a prominent co-vocalist role played by former Dillinger Escape Plan singer Greg Puciato, who also makes an appearance on *I Want Blood*. But *Brighten* was Cantrell's first solo project in 19 years. During that long stretch of time, he had been focused mostly on resurrecting Alice in Chains, the grunge-era multi-platinum act whose career was cut short by the tragic death of singer Layne Staley in 2002. Their comeback had been a success, starting with 2009's *Black Gives Way to Blue*. Like AC/DC before them, it was a rare case of a rock band successfully carrying on after the death of a dynamic frontman, as the record went gold and hit No. 5 on the *Billboard* 200. Two more albums later with singer William DuVall, Alice in Chains is fully reestablished as an active touring and recording unit, and this year performed at the high-profile Sick New World festival in Las Vegas.

With Alice back on solid ground — and after the three-year cycle of writing, recording and touring for their 2018 album *Rainier Fog* — Cantrell had some downtime on his hands and returned to the solo career he began with 1998's *Boggy Depot* (which was followed by *Degradation Trip* in 2002). The singer-guitarist stretched out in new ways on 2021's *Brighten* — a collection of hard rock and wounded ballads that included a few twangy echoes of Ennio Morricone.

"I was fired up after that experience," Cantrell says now. "I felt like I maybe wanted to get to work a little bit quicker and maybe do another one while I had the time and the opportunity."

What emerges in the songs of *I Want Blood* is something heavier. The menacing "Vilified" opens the album with layers of massive, swirling guitar, a thundering Trujillo bassline and Sharone drumbeat,

GROOMING: SANDY BOWMAN

"I live, breathe and eat Alice in Chains. I love being in the band. But occasionally it's good to get out of the boat and go take a swim on your own."
— Jerry Cantrell

and Cantrell's sneering vocal: "Heya schadenfreude crescendo/A.I. skew the innuendo." Elsewhere, the tracks "Off the Rails" and "Throw Me a Line" deliver weighty, slippery riffs and the kind of memorable rock hooks he's been creating since the earliest days of Alice in Chains.

The nine-song album was recorded earlier this year with production by Cantrell and Joe Barresi. Sessions unfolded amid the red brick walls and loads of vintage gear at Barresi's JHOC Studio (a.k.a. Joe's House of Compression) in Pasadena, California. "You walk into his studio and it's like 10 Guitar Centers all crammed into one, [filled] with the last 50 years of gear," Cantrell explains of collaborating with the producer, known for his work with a startling roster of major acts, including TOOL, Slipknot and Queens of the Stone Age.

The brooding "Echoes of Laughter" began as a riff that Bates had been playing whenever they got together. Bates, acclaimed for his work as a soundtrack composer and a producer for Marilyn Manson, HEALTH and Starcrawler, was also Cantrell's main creative partner on *Brighten*. And when it came time to tour behind the record, Bates joined him on the road. It was on that tour that this riff kept coming up — at soundchecks and in dressing rooms, then again during jam sessions in Cantrell's living room or at Bates' place. (While Bates wasn't able to participate on most of *I Want Blood*, his daughter Lola Colette sings backup on several tracks.)

"This record has a few riffs that have been cycling around for a while. Like, 'I'm looking for a home. I'm a good riff, where are you gonna put me?'" Cantrell says with a chuckle. "We were up at my place, and [Tyler] started dinking around. I'm like, 'You keep playing that, man. Let's make something out of that.'"

They began recording as Bates played the riff once more. Cantrell picked up his guitar to play a counterpoint against that, and a song was finally sketched out. Later, they reconvened to record a better demo version of what they'd created, this time with drum machine and effects.

"We get it all mocked up and ready to go, and he hands me the guitar. I'm like, 'Dude, you played it. You came up with it,'" Cantrell recalls. "That piece of music is pretty much exclusively — front to back — written by Tyler. I put a couple of little flourishes in there, and then I wrote the lyrics. But it's a really emotional, cinematic tune. It touches on the beauty and also the finiteness of life. All our moments end — but there's a lot of beautiful moments in the story, from beginning to end. That song touches on that theme a little bit: celebrating and also letting go."

Supported by background vocals from Puciato, Cantrell responded to the music with lyrics of loss: "Laid you down, let go, a flower in the sun/Rumble from above, the transfer had begun/Not gonna see ya or hold you close again."

"It's a very common human experience," Cantrell notes. When it comes to lyrics, he explains, his words tend to be based largely on personal history or human moments he's witnessed in others. It's never been easy.

"I agonize over it, and it's the fucking worst part," he admits with a laugh. "It's awesome when you're done, but it's so fucking frustrating. And it always comes last in the process — you have the music first, and then, OK, now what the hell am I gonna say? I can totally take this great piece of music and fuck it up real quick by writing something stupid."

But, he continues, "You have to allow yourself to fuck up. You have to allow yourself the space to make some mistakes — and get in there and work on something until it starts to take shape. A lot of the times I don't really even know what the hell the thing is until I'm done. And even then, sometimes I'm like, Where did that come from? I think good lyric writing, number one, it's gotta be personal. You have to start with yourself and your own emotions, your own feelings, your own observations."

In one example, for the song "Let It Lie," Cantrell unloads a snarling vocal as cutting as the guitars. "That's a personal-relationship lyric. You can plug and play whichever relationship you have in your life with somebody that you butt heads with — but fuckin' love to death at the same time," he explains.

For Cantrell, inspiration can come from many places. An hour or two before this interview, he was reading an article about guitar hero Joe Walsh, in which he describes writing the lyrics to his 1973 hit "Rocky Mountain Way." "He was completely blocked, and the band's like, 'Dude, we need some lyrics,'" Cantrell relates from the interview. "So, he just started going stream of consciousness. He's standing and he's looking at the Rocky Mountains — like, 'Spent the last year/Rocky Mountain way/Couldn't get much higher.' And then, the whole, 'He's telling us this, he's telling us that' is his manager who called."

Cantrell explains that Walsh was one of many players from the classic-rock era that left a mark on him. "James Gang, solo career, Eagles — I love that dude. That guy is a great songwriter, great singer. Excellent guitar player. Tone for days. Joe Walsh is high on my personal list for sure."

He also recalls being an impressionable kid and hearing Walsh's 1978 autobiographical "Life's Been Good" single on the radio, with its stories of parties, limos, Maseratis and rock-star decadence ("I live in hotels, tear out the walls/I have accountants pay for it all"). That all sounded good to Cantrell, who ended up having some similar experiences a decade or two later as a member of a hit-making hard-rock band. "I've lived a few of those stories. And even if I haven't lived them personally, I've been standing next to somebody who did," he says. "So, I was at the scene of the crime."

On *I Want Blood*, some of Cantrell's lyrics are laid bare during "Held Your Tongue," as he sings the entire opening verse a cappella. From the earliest Alice recordings, Cantrell had been a key ingredient in the

Greg Puciato and (opposite page) Jerry Cantrell performing in Sterling Heights, Michigan, 2024

band's vocal sound, his lines blending with Staley's to create an intense and instantly recognizable style. As the band and his solo records rolled on, that style has remained. But singing without accompaniment, even if only for a verse, suggests Cantrell's increasing confidence as a vocalist.

"I felt like I was operating at the top of my abilities as a singer, for sure. I think I'm growing. I'm trying to get more consistent at everything. That's the goal," he says, "whether it's playing guitar, whether it's singing, whether it's songwriting, whether it's producing, whether it's working and playing well with others.

"You're trying to get as consistent as you can, so that when the inevitable ups and downs happen, at least you have a baseline to go back to. On the last record, I felt like it took a step up. I feel like it took another step up on this, vocally especially."

The album closes with an epic, "It Comes," which unfolds with a dreamy guitar pattern and another elegant classic-rock guitar solo, before ending with an extended single note — not unlike the piano chord that concludes the Beatles' "A Day in the Life." For Cantrell, though, the song echoes his appreciation for Pink Floyd and their iconic guitarist David Gilmour.

During the recording session, Cantrell had a sudden moment of inspiration and pressed his face close to his guitar's single pickup and shouted the immortal Floyd line from "Another Brick in the Wall, Part 2": "How can you have any pudding if you don't eat your meat?" A close listen reveals something of that vocal bit in the song's final moments. Cantrell recalls, "I just screamed it into my guitar because I was in the vibe, and I just thought it was funny."

Though his love for Pink Floyd runs deep — and the example Gilmour set as an essential guitar hero is profound — he's never had a chance to meet the man. "I'd like to hang out with that dude for a couple hours someday," he says. "At the very least."

"I love Gilmour. And I love Floyd," he continues. "They're a big band for me. I didn't sit down intending to have that flavor come out, but it just naturally did. I think that song has a little bit of shimmer and little elements of my appreciation for Floyd. You can't touch those guys. I put Gilmour in my top five of guitar players that I admire and respect."

As Cantrell rolled across the U.S. for his summer tour, most of what he'd created on *I Want Blood* would have to be kept under wraps, with the exception of "Vilified." In the Nineties, Alice in Chains would sometimes road-test new songs destined for upcoming records — but that was the era before smartphones, and fans sharing hi-def video of an entire show from the night before on YouTube.

That was not an issue back when they would test songs like "Would?" and "Rooster" — other than the occasional bootlegger sneaking a tape recorder into a show, and maybe plugging into the soundboard. It was a select few that heard those scratchy recordings anyway.

"Generally, I like people to hear the best version of the song first — instead of some crappy version off of

somebody's phone," Cantrell says. "And then it's all right to have the flood of videos and stuff like that. That's maybe altered how I go about doing things, and probably a lot of [other] artists, too."

Cantrell doesn't spend much time looking backward, he says. But the guitarist does see himself as part of a continuum of music — picking up from the classic rockers he grew up with, creating his own sound, and paying it forward.

"I'm part of a community that was handed to me," he says. "And then I've been able to hand that off to other people, other generations of musicians, and see them pick up that baton and go fuckin' run their race — and then they'll hand it to somebody else. It's a fuckin' cool thing to do. It's a noble effort, you know?"

Cantrell will be focused on his new music and touring with his solo band well into 2025. He's excited to be there — but a return to Alice in Chains is inevitable, even if there are no specific plans in place following last April's Sick New World gig.

> "I'm part of a community that was handed to me. And I've been able to hand that off to other generations and see them pick up that baton and go fuckin' run their race."
> — Cantrell

"At some point we're going to be out there rocking again," he says. "I don't know exactly when that's going to be, but when the right opportunity presents itself or we decide, 'Hey, let's do this,' then we'll do it.

"It's nice to be able to do both. You can look at my history and you know where my fuckin' heart lies — it's on my sleeve. I live, breathe and eat Alice, and I love the guys. I love being in the band. [But] occasionally it's good to get out of the boat and go take a swim on your own. It's a healthy thing. The boat is always right there and you can swim back to it. That remains the case for all of us."

Exploring a solo career has been an inspiring place to be these last few years, he says, even as Alice remains an ongoing commitment. "Follow your gut, be yourself. You do those two things and, win or lose, you're going to be fine," Cantrell concludes. "That's the motto that we've always operated on. No matter what I'm doing, I try to start from those two places: Fucking trust your gut, fucking bet on yourself."

Belgium

On the eve of the celebrated metal festival's return – **Bad Omens**, **Parkway Drive**, **Architects** and more tell tales of live-concert mayhem, past and future

TEXT **Gregory Adams**

MUNICH
SECURITY

THE TIME FOR MAYHEM IS NOW, AGAIN.

FOR EIGHT YEARS, BETWEEN 2008 AND 2015, THE MAYHEM FESTIVAL WAS THE UNITED STATES' PREMIER TRAVELING HEAVY-MUSIC EVENT. Just look at the legendary lineups that were taken across the country back then, each year a unique cavalcade of classic, contemporary and emerging metal talent led by headliners Slipknot, Slayer, Avenged Sevenfold and more. When festival organizers announced this year that, nearly a decade later, Mayhem would make its grand return in 2024 as a one-day festival in San Bernardino, California — with a new wave of heavy favorites including Bad Omens, Architects, Parkway Drive, Poppy and more topping the bill — music fans immediately got excited.

"The way they curated the different colors of the heavy-metal rainbow, so to speak — a diverse group of bands from different subgenres and eras — just became the calling card for metalheads in the summer," recalls Ash Avildsen, founder and CEO of Sumerian Records and the architect behind the relaunched Mayhem Festival, of the fest's original run.

Avildsen knows Mayhem's history well. Back in 2008, he was a booking agent working with deathcore group Suicide Silence. The band had built up some hype but were having trouble breaking through to the next level — at least until Mayhem Festival reached out to put them on the inaugural tour, to support Slipknot. Mayhem was a major turning point in Suicide Silence's career, and indeed for numerous other acts, too.

The return of Mayhem is about more than nostalgia though. Sure, Avildsen is helping revive an iconic brand, and this year's stop at the Glen Helen Amphitheater is, coincidently, on the same site that held the third-ever Mayhem show back in 2008 — but this is also a chance to see how much heavy music has changed in the decade since Mayhem Festival went dark.

From the breathtaking-but-bleak, heavy melodicism of Bad Omens, to Poppy's eclectic pop-dustrial subversion, to the much-anticipated emergence of Seven Hours After Violet, the new deathcore group from System of a Down's Shavo Odadjian and members of Left to Suffer and Winds of Plague — this year's lineup reflects a generation of artists that have established themselves as major players since the last Mayhem Fest. While there are veteran acts in this year's lineup, too — from the reunited Kittie to Aussie metalcore giants Parkway Drive to original Mayhem participants Suicide Silence and Unearth — what excites Avildsen is that some of the youngest bands are making the biggest waves right now. And it's about damn time.

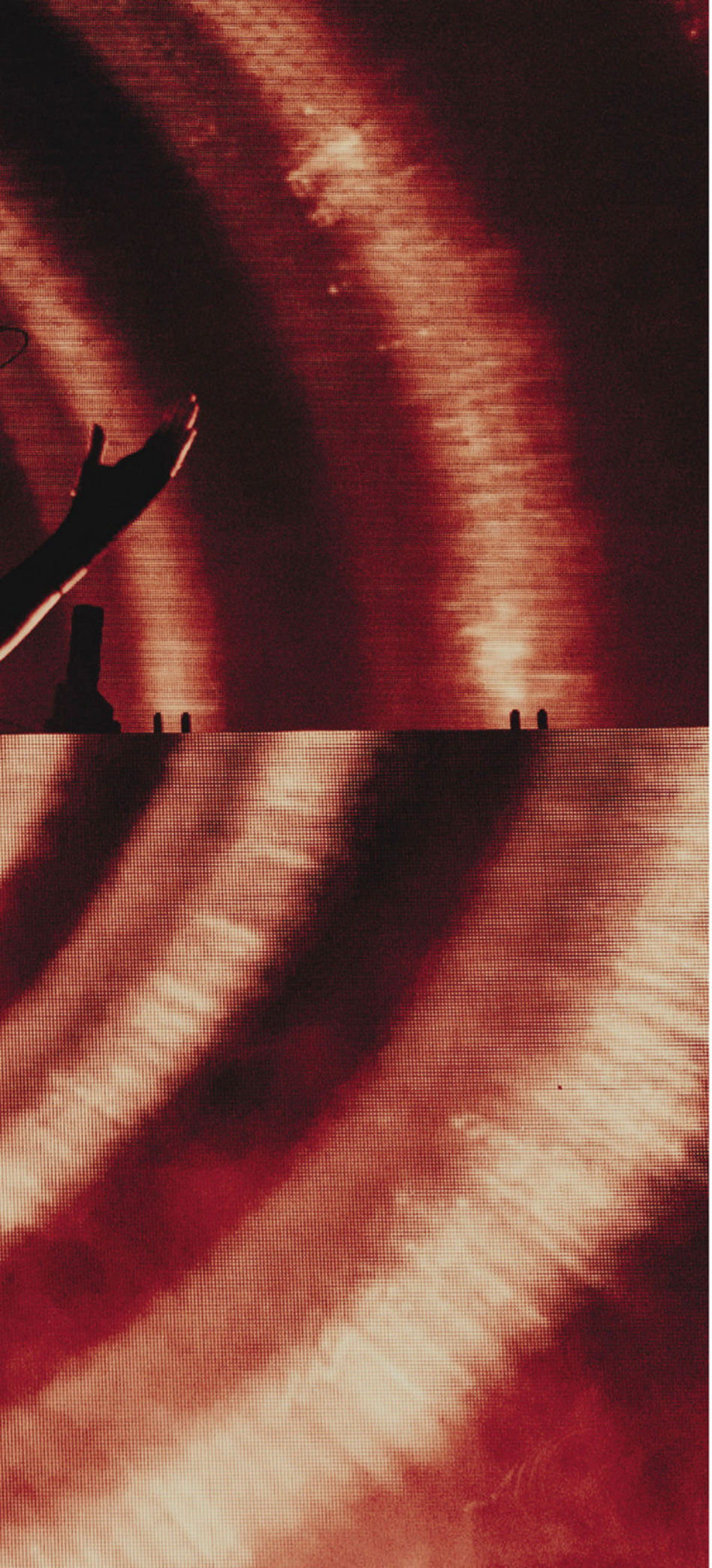
"I love all the older acts that headline a lot of the rock festivals in the U.S.," Avildsen says. "But I think it's a bit naïve to think that there's not an urgent need to break new headlining bands.

"When I think back to when I was a teenager in the Nineties, the whole new wave of big bands like Korn and Slipknot were young guys. It's been a long time since we've had a wave of bands with singers that are in their twenties that can really headline festivals. I feel like we're finally there with a number of bands, [and] I think Mayhem can really help elevate this era the same way that it had elevated bands 10-15 years ago."

What's certain is that, just like the old days, this fall's Mayhem Festival is a must-see event for the metal community — as well as a preview of what fans can expect from future fests. "We decided [to] bring it back for one day and reestablish that the brand is back," says Avildsen, "and that will give us a lot more lead time to assemble a full [2025] summer tour."

It's about to get crazy. So with that in mind, we caught up with eight of Mayhem 2024's most electric bands — Bad Omens, Architects, Poppy, Parkway Drive, Jinjer, HANABIE., Seven Hours After Violet and Kittie — to hear about the chaos and carnage they've already experienced onstage, and what kind of mayhem is in store for fans in the future.

OPENING SPREAD: BRYAN KIRKS; OPPOSITE PAGE: PAUL BERGEN/REDFERNS



BAD OMENS NOAH SEBASTIAN

Bad Omens' headlining set may be one of Mayhem's most anticipated performances, but for different reasons than most. The Richmond, Virginia, band's only remaining North American concert appearance of 2024 marks a return to the stage following a brief live hiatus, brought on by the "extreme burnout" vocalist Noah Sebastian was feeling after spending the past decade transmuting Bad Omens' metalcore origins into a breathtakingly violet-hued amalgam of alt-metal, glitchy R&B, electronic experimentation and more. The set is poised to celebrate myriad fan-favorites written along the way, and likewise act as the final resting place for Bad Omens' now two-years-running *The Death of Peace of Mind* tour cycle.

MAYHEM FEST IS KNOWN FOR ITS DIVERSE LINEUP AND ENERGETIC ATMOSPHERE. HOW DOES PERFORMING AT A LARGE, MULTI-GENRE FESTIVAL INFLUENCE THE WAY YOU APPROACH YOUR SOUND, SETLIST OR STAGE PERFORMANCE?
NOAH SEBASTIAN It doesn't affect it much at all, to be honest, other than the setlist — in instances where we have a reduced set length, and we want to prioritize playing our more popular or energetic songs. But we retain a consistent general philosophy and approach to all aspects of our performances, which is to never be something we're not for the satisfaction of anyone else. At the end of the day, it's our taste and style that draws people to us in the first place. Playing a festival isn't going to influence that.

MAYHEM HAS QUITE A LEGACY OF PERFORMERS: SLIPKNOT, SLAYER, KORN, AVENGED SEVENFOLD AND MORE. DOES THE FESTIVAL'S HISTORY ADD EXTRA PRESSURE OR EXPECTATIONS FOR YOU AS A PERFORMER? Well as for pressure, I apply enough of that on myself to begin with, so the history [of the festival] isn't something I think about. I'm just focused on doing a great job and having fun, because they are greatly intertwined. I realized recently, before the last two festivals we played, that there's a part of me that still feels the need to prove to the naysayers that we deserve these festival slots and lineups because of how seemingly fast it may appear we got them — and how much younger we are than a lot of the bands usually on the top of the bill. I, myself, know we do — but I want everyone else to know it, too, by putting on an undeniably great performance every time.

MAYHEM WILL BE BAD OMENS' FIRST SHOW AFTER TAKING THE SUMMER OFF. WHAT KIND OF PREPARATION ARE YOU UNDERTAKING TO GET READY FOR THE PERFORMANCE? We've generally been playing the same set since the Concrete Forever tour in the fall of 2023, with a subtly evolving production and setlist. But after this break we're coming back with a new show entirely, hopefully for the last time until our next album cycle begins. It demands a lot of time, creativity and nuance trying to make these now-old songs feel new and special every time we do a new tour within this very long album cycle.

PARKWAY DRIVE
WINSTON McCALL

As Parkway Drive's all-energy frontman since the Aussie metalcore veterans formed in 2003, Winston McCall has witnessed countless chaotic concert scenes around the globe. In fact, the vocalist is oftentimes the catalyst. The past couple of years, in particular — as the group continue promoting their 2022 full-length *Darker Still* — the dynamic performer has been running into the middle of the pit each night to stand on a small podium and command upwards of thousands of festival concertgoers to circle pit around him. Considering the unpredictable velocity of a human-made hurricane, this can be dangerous as fuck. McCall knows that. That's exactly why he does it.

"The first time we ever played Russia we expected some craziness," McCall tells us when asked to recount his wildest story of live-concert mayhem. "There were a lot of people in this club, and I remember about a third of the way into our set, watching someone literally set themselves on fire — there was a Human Torch in the middle of the pit. Someone was just like, 'Yup! Time to set myself on fire and mosh!' He was just fuckin' windmillin' in the middle of the pit while burning. And it was not a small fire. This was before we even used any [pyro]. I remember us looking at each other going, 'The *fuck* is going on?'

"The really crazy thing was the fact that *no one else* blinked an eye at it — like, dude's on fire... but let's continue with the madness! By the end of the set the entire stage was covered with people. We thought it was going to collapse. I was stage-diving off the amps. At one point people started climbing on top of barstools and started crowd-surfing them — and this was all *after* the Human Torch! After the show it was like, 'Let's get the fuck out of here,' because everyone had gone absolutely mental. We got bundled off into a van while someone was screaming at us in Russian to get out, because the club was about to get shut down.

"But the worst thing that has happened to us onstage actually happened [at a different show] to our bass player, Jia [O'Connor]. We used to have a lot of beach balls onstage. Jia and our guitarist, Luke [Kilpatrick] got into a fun thing where they would kick them at each other. But a big beach ball's actually got weight to it. One time Luke just kicked the fuck out of a bigger beach ball, and it went straight at the headstock of Jia's bass while he was halfway through a headbang — and the force of his head coming down and mashing the headstock split his eyebrow open, like really fuckin' deep. Stitches worthy. Blood was pouring down his face. He's half-concussed, but played the rest of the set with blood pissing out of his head. We were in Europe and didn't know how [best] to go to a hospital. And we were like, 'We have a show tomorrow, so let's just superglue your eyebrow back together.'

"So we went to a gas station and got a bunch of superglue — and then did this dodgy tour surgery in the front lounge of the bus. Jia just laid down, we held [the cut] together, and then we superglued his eyebrow shut. So now he's got this huge lump of superglue and blood hanging off his head for the rest of the tour. He has this right-big scar split down his eyebrow, because obviously it didn't heal properly. We're idiots!"

PREVIOUS SPREAD: BRYAN KIRKS; THIS PAGE: RUNE HELLESTAD - CORBIS/CORBIS VIA GETTY IMAGES

ARCHITECTS SAM CARTER

Whether through their percussive, hammering metalcore beginnings or the crossover pop appeal of this year's still-metal-plated single, "The Curse," U.K. vets Architects have built themselves a towering following over their 20-year career. And the highs are only getting higher. Ahead of hitting Mayhem, vocalist Sam Carter and the rest of the outfit dominated a headlining performance at Germany's Wacken Open Air festival — so they're more than ready to go big when they show up in San Bernardino.

WHAT'S THE CRAZIEST THING YOU'VE SEEN TAKE PLACE DURING AN ARCHITECTS SHOW?
SAM CARTER There was a circle pit that we had going at Hellfest in France, and it was one of the craziest I've ever seen. Just huge! It was one of those times where I actually felt like, OK, someone could die here, and this might be my fault. This was during our song "when we were young" — it's become a trait of ours to have it near the end of the set. It's a hardcore/metal song, and it's a faster part of our set, which is good for a circle pit. It was awesome. I just told them, "Spin around!"

HOW DOES PLAYING A LARGE FESTIVAL INFLUENCE THE WAY ARCHITECTS APPROACH THEIR PERFORMANCE? You have to make sure you've got your bangers and big songs that you know get a good crowd reaction. You also have to address the crowd in a different way. Not everybody there is going to be there for you, so you have to get them on your side and show them that you've got a lot of energy. It's easier when you're playing in a venue that's full of your fans — you go out and everybody is very excited to see you. And if you're headlining the festival, it's fucking great — we actually just headlined Wacken and it was amazing. If you're trying to win over a crowd, though, it's a different kind of vibe.

CAN YOU REMEMBER A SPECIFIC TIME WHEN ARCHITECTS REALLY HAD TO WORK HARD TO WIN OVER A CROWD? Yeah — probably every single American tour we did until a few years ago. [*Laughs*] Warped Tour was interesting back in the day, because no one really knew us. But from [2014's] *Lost Forever // Lost Together* onwards we started doing a lot better in America.

THIS YEAR MARKS THE RETURN OF MAYHEM FESTIVAL, WHICH HAS THIS HUGE LEGACY OF PERFORMERS BEHIND IT. DOES ARCHITECTS NOW BEING PART OF THAT HISTORY ADD ANY PRESSURE FOR YOU? As someone who does get inside their head quite a bit when it comes to performing, I think the best thing you can do is just try to enjoy [the moment] and the simplicity of getting on a big stage with your friends to play to a group of people that like heavy music. I'm just excited for the opportunity to be back in America and have our band play to a larger amount of people. Hopefully we come away with some new fans that enjoy what we do.

WHO ARE YOU MOST LOOKING FORWARD TO SEEING AT THE FEST? I've never seen Poppy before, but I am a fan of hers and I just love that new single she just brought out, "New Way Out." It's a great song! I've not seen her live, so that's always exciting, when you get to see someone for the first time.

ANYTHING YOU CAN TEASE ABOUT YOUR MAYHEM PERFORMANCE? I think it will be good. [*Laughs*] If there's a conversation about getting a guest spot, that stuff generally comes up in the few days leading up to the fest. I wouldn't put it past us, though. Brutus are playing the festival as well, and they're one of my favorite bands in the world! They're also out on tour with us just before we get to Mayhem. I've never spoken to her about it, but I would love to try and get Steffanie [Mannaerts, Brutus' drummer-vocalist] up to sing with us.

ED MASON

JINJER TATIANA SHMAYLUK

While the Mayhem lineup is full of international talent, Ukrainian prog-metal heavies Jinjer may be the only act heading to San Bernardino as full-fledged metal ambassadors — quite literally. The Donetsk quartet were granted permission by Ukraine's Ministry of Culture a couple of years ago to tour the world and raise awareness of the country's ongoing conflict with Russia. It's no wonder why they've been chosen to represent the Ukrainian art scene: Jinjer's music has stunned many through quick-twisting heaviness, anthemic, galvanizing choruses, and the staggering cleans-to-screams of vocal juggernaut Tatiana Shmayluk. With an as-yet-unannounced fifth full-length in the works, Jinjer are bound to remain major players on a global scale.

"Our whole life as musicians has been chaos, basically," says Shmayluk, when asked to describe the wildest thing Jinjer have experienced at one of their live shows. "Especially in the beginning of our touring career — that was when all the weird, crazy situations started.

"One time in Texas, a dude DM'ed me that he was going to bring a gun to a show. Even before that he texted me a lot of weird stuff. We could obviously tell that he was fucked up, or something. I saw that he texted, like, 'Hey, in few days you play Texas, so I'm going to bring my gun.' I told our tour manager that she should put him on the blacklist, and then he texted back [after the show], 'Why did you do that? They didn't let me in!'

"Another time, we played in France and had screens standing on each side of the stage with our logo on it. They were in metal frames. Some dude climbed the stage — very drunk — stumbled up and just threw himself into one of the screens and broke it. That was crazy. We play bigger stages now, and it's impossible to climb up because of all the barriers, and of course, there's security and the stages are higher. As far as injuries? Well, there's been some small dental stuff, like when you kick a microphone against your teeth or something, or you hit your nose against your knee when you bend too far. I also remember singing shows with tonsillitis, and, dude, it was horrible. It was like rubbing sandpaper against an open wound. Screaming with that kind of throat was torture. I sounded like some kind of a zombie."

THIS PAGE: ELSIE ROYMANS/GETTY IMAGES; OPPOSITE PAGE: ALANA LOPEZ

POPPY

Poppy's subversive, surrealistic genre-obliterating rise within the ranks of heavy music has shown us but a sliver of the myriad sides of an eclectic figure: pseudo-android YouTube performance artist, grunge-ish punk, breakdown-obsessed screamer with a thing for trap and '60s bubblegum, Grammy-nominated metal-pop absurdist and nocturnal club-kid. Though Poppy sang on her smash 2023 LP *Zig* that she's spent much of her life trying to find "the real thing," the truth is that the chameleon-like whimsy that fuels each Poppy project keeps us on our toes, and each genre hybrid has been a good look for a master of disguise who nevertheless remains singularly "Poppy."

This year has been just as much of a thrill ride — between Poppy's guest spot on Bad Omens' slamming "V.A.N" single and her screaming contributions to Knocked Loose's crushing "Suffocate" to the promise of more solo work on the way. Paraphrasing the deep introspection within Poppy's most recent, diamond-iridescent industrial banger, "New Way Out," both the artist and the public have been forced to face who she's become of late — and damn, is it ever radiant.

KITTIE MORGAN LANDER

Through their time as teenage spitfires blazing a trail at the forefront of the nu-metal movement, to their current phoenix-like reunion era, Kittie have pretty well seen it all. Across more than 25 years of metal-making, founding sisters Morgan Lander and Mercedes Lander and the rest of the Ontario-formed foursome have faced fan-frenzy as MTV favorites, experienced personal tragedy through the death of bassist Trish Doan, witnessed their share of haywire concert moments, and, after enduring several years of inactivity and uncertainty, learned how to transform youthful angst into refined rage. With *Fire*, Kittie's incendiary new album, the Canadian icons have honed all that chaos into a killer comeback that's primed to bring the heat at Mayhem.

"There was a lot of pandemonium early on in our career," says Morgan Lander. "Some of the craziest and wildest experiences we had were on that very first Slipknot headlining tour that we did [in 2000]. There were a number of shows where people were hanging from the rafters, or where the fire marshal got called. People were just letting loose in a way that I had never seen before, and that was definitely something that has left an indelible mark on my mind.

"Our early live shows were very chaotic. We brought blow-up dolls onstage, destroyed them and then threw them into the crowd. We did a lot of crazy stuff like that. The energy was very exciting, because this was a new experience for us. We were still very young and not very seasoned. One of the very first U.S. headlining shows we ever did was when we recorded the [2000] *Spit in Your Eye* VHS. It was right after the release of our first album, *Spit*, and we were not prepared for the crowds — or the chaos that ensued. The lighting rig was being pulled down, the barricades were being ripped apart — people were really wild. It was getting to the point of being dangerous, the kind of chaos that you feel like you have no control over. You feel that there's a lot of energy in the room — it's a little enticing, but also very scary, because you don't want people to get hurt. You don't want anybody to succumb to any injuries. There were a lot of uncertain feelings for us early on. The experience was very much like, 'I just cannot believe that this is happening.'

"Another time we were headlining a show in Texas, and the PA caught on fire at the venue. Our sound guy was just pushing it too hard, and legit flames and smoke started coming out of the PA. I think we ended up having to stop the show, because it was just too out of control. You don't want the whole venue to go up, or anything like that. Fun times!"

THIS PAGE: BARRY BRECHEISEN/WIREIMAGE; OPPOSITE PAGE: KEVIN WINTER/GETTY IMAGES FOR ABA

SEVEN HOURS AFTER VIOLET
SHAVO ODADJIAN

Seven Hours After Violet may be making their live festival debut at Mayhem, but the Los Angeles-based deathcore explorers are certainly no strangers to stages. The quintet comprises members of bruising units Left to Suffer and Winds of Plague, as well as a one-time *American Idol* contestant in singer-guitarist Scarypoolparty — and, oh, did we mention that the project was put together by none other than System of a Down's Shavo fucking Odadjian? As the bassist for one of the most successful heavy bands of the millennium, Odadjian's helped write the nu-metal handbook — and has already experienced countless concert moments as wild as System's head-spinning output.

"This was on the Pledge of Allegiance tour [in 2001], which was System of a Down and Slipknot," says Odadjian, when asked about the craziest live moment of his career so far. "We were playing, and [late Slipknot drummer] Joey Jordison got on the drums during 'Suite-Pee.' It was the last song of our set. John [Dolmayan, SOAD drummer] was in the background dancing around, but in the ending of 'Suite-Pee' he ran onstage and tackled me down while I'm playing. It's online if you look up 'System of a Down fight.' They think we're fighting, but we're playing like cubs, you know what I mean? There was no fight, but he pulled me down. Then Daron [Malakian, SOAD guitarist] ends the song and doggy-piled me. He jumps up, lands — and then his guitar headstock breaks my skull. Literally, my head is open.

"I passed out for a second. Next thing I know, I'm in an ambulance getting taken to the hospital after my show. I'm still in my stage gear. I get into the emergency ward and it's all kids from the show that got hurt in the pit. So, they open their eyes and here's Shavo, the guy that was just onstage. I shook all their hands, took pictures with 'em. I got crazy stitches on my head and my eye, and it was such an amazing moment. That's just *one* story with System.

"I've also fallen off the stage a lot. There was another time where System were playing KROQ's Acoustic Christmas and my grandpa came to that show, God rest his soul. I'd been drinking, and then I was talking to him on the mic while the song was going on. I was just focusing on my grandpa being in the crowd, it was so crazy. Then I walked off the stage with my bass on — like, six feet high. I just fell into the pit. Thank God I didn't get injured, but I could have broken my freaking neck. My grandpa was probably going, 'Damn... he's faded!' [*Laughs*] I've had good moments and bad moments — I'm grateful that I'm here, and I can talk about them as my past and learn from them."

HANABIE. YUKINA

Tokyo's HANABIE. have been honing their hyper-stylized and hella-eclectic "Harajuku-core" since 2016 — forming in their first year of high school before becoming an international heavy-music phenom by impossibly blending hyperpop, metalcore and so much more. Through various singles and album releases, and mostly recently with the subversively brutal party-pop anthem "Girl's Talk," they've built up a devoted base of supporters that includes Limp Bizkit, Bring Me the Horizon and a legion of costumed-and-crowd-surfing fanatics. Vocalist Yukina is at the front of the throng, energetically contorting herself from melodic extremes into bestial growls as the madness unfolds all around her.

"First of all, there's a *lot* of crowd-surfing at our shows. It gets pretty crazy," says Yukina. "Once there was a guy in a wheelchair who crowd-surfed from the back of the venue to the front — all of the people underneath him were really careful to bring him to the front, though. One time there was a guy wearing a panda outfit rolling over the crowd — like, he wanted to be a big plushie. Another time there was a guy wearing a full-faced strawberry mask. They're also all singing while surfing up to the stage. And everybody's laughing along with them.

"There's a big difference between club shows and festivals. With the festivals, they're generally new fans — people who have not seen HANABIE. before. So in that sense, when we start playing, the audience reaction is often surprise. Seeing that makes us really happy. And when we do our own shows, those are already our fans. We really feel the big love when they start chanting "HANABIE. HANABIE." before the show starts. That gets us hyped."

So what's the wildest thing Yukina's ever witnessed at a HANABIE. show? "We were out on tour with While She Sleeps in Asia last year," she recalls. "This was in Thailand at a two-story live house, where there were people in the upstairs and downstairs. During a really good part in the chorus of one of their songs, [While She Sleeps'] vocalist [Lawrence Taylor] climbed up to the second floor and made this perfect dive into the audience below. Super crazy! And then, the guitarist and bassist also joined him in the mosh pit. It was chaotic. Maybe I'd do that, but that'd be kind of scary... I need a bit more courage."

JOSH BRASTED/FILMMAGIC

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"三屍 (SANSHI)"

RIPPED TO SHREDS

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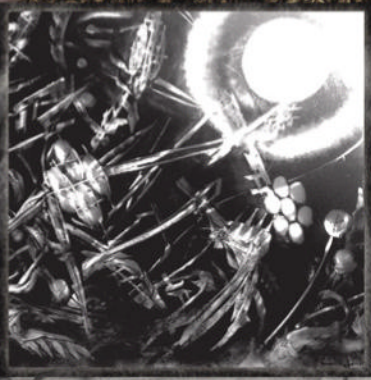

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LOVERS

How letting go of the past helped former members of **Every Time I Die** and **Dillinger Escape Plan** find peace – and a furious new sound

TEXT **Emma Wilkes**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Jason Goodrich**

"YOUR NEXT BAND IS GOING TO BE HORRIBLE."

THAT WAS JUST ONE OF THE THOUSANDS OF "EVIL" ONLINE MESSAGES THAT Jordan Buckley received in 2022 after the dissolution of his long-running band, Every Time I Die. But instead of getting crushed by the haters, these attacks actually set Buckley free.

Unburdened by expectations, the guitarist was able to live in the moment, rediscover pure creativity and experience the joy of making music simply for the love of it. This freedom ultimately led him to launch Better Lovers, the supergroup featuring former Dillinger Escape Plan frontman Greg Puciato, Buckley's ETID bandmates Steve "Mitch" Micciche and Clayton "Goose" Holyoak, and Fit for an Autopsy guitarist Will Putney.

After introducing themselves with their 2023 EP, *God Made Me an Animal*, we find Buckley gearing up to release Better Lovers' debut album *Highly Irresponsible.* He's buzzing with positivity. He's no longer dogged by doubt. Music is shiny, new and exciting again — skeptics be damned. "These monsters that were trying to kill my career, they only ended up helping," he says, "because there was no pressure."

Buckley isn't the only one for whom Better Lovers has been a transformative experience. The band has also been an unexpected heavy-music rebirth for Puciato. Since Dillinger disbanded following 2016's *Dissociation*, the singer has been focusing on an eclectic range of projects: from solo work (his most recent EP, *FC5N*, dropped earlier this year) to the synthwave supergroup the Black Queen to the melting pot of metal greats that is Killer Be Killed (alongside members of Soulfly, Mastodon and Converge). He's also been singing backup vocals for Jerry Cantrell.

"I'm super fucking proud of our record," says Puciato. "I can't believe how genuinely into it I am, because I didn't think I had any of this left in me."

The present is treating both Puciato and Buckley kindly, so it's no wonder that both artists have no desire to relive their pasts. Where plenty of musicians are happy to roll back the years for a night or for a tour — and reap the financial benefits — nostalgia is a no-go for Better Lovers. Puciato, in particular, finds the concept acutely repellant. It's been almost a decade since he closed the book on the Dillinger Escape Plan, after all, and time has put a remarkable distance between the Puciato of 2024 and the anxious, depressed, raging person he was back then.

"What they're doing is they're offering you money to put on a fucking suit of who you were 20 years ago and pretend that you're that person — so that everyone in the crowd can also remember who they were 20 years ago," he argues of anniversary tours. "I don't fucking relate to it at all. My life right now is infinitely better than it was 20 years ago."

For Buckley, the pain of his past is a little closer. The ugly, messy fracturing of Every Time I Die — which featured his brother, Keith Buckley, on vocals — is still a relatively fresh memory for the legions of fans left disappointed by their unexpected split. The striking thing is, however — thanks to the passing of time and the help of therapy — the guitarist is slowly becoming more forthcoming about his experiences, and how they've helped lead him towards a brighter future with Better Lovers.

"A year or two ago, I wouldn't have talked about it because it hurt so much," he explains. "But I've dealt with it, I made peace with it, I moved on." Still, he's keen to stress that he isn't sharing these details to gain sympathy, but to deliver what he believes to be an "origin story" for Better Lovers.

"My past is what made me so grateful to be in Better Lovers and so grateful to be on tour again," Buckley says. "Everything happens *for* you and not *to* you. If I didn't have to go through this fucking car crash, I would not be in Better Lovers right now. Therefore, I have no choice but to be grateful that it happened, as fucked up as it made me."

Better Lovers, then, is a silver lining. Crucially, however, it's not a hybrid of the Dillinger Escape Plan and Every Time I Die. *Highly Irresponsible* standouts "Your Misplaced Self" and "A White Horse Covered in Blood" bristle with scabrous hardcore grit, while "Future Myopia" screeches and thumps and the slowly unfurling "Deliver Us From Life" is a genius, jagged slice of balladry that breaks new ground for everyone involved in the project. Of course, fans of Dillinger and ETID have inevitably flocked to hear what their longtime favorites are doing, but both Puciato and Buckley have noticed that a sizeable section of their fanbase have found them without really knowing their erstwhile bands. Better Lovers is its own beast, and it's roaring loudly.

"Being too young to have seen Dillinger is not a crazy thing, because Dillinger's last record came out eight years ago. That's more than middle school and high school put together, right?" reasons Puciato. "Every Time I Die broke up like two to three years ago, but in that time, what's happened? Turnstile, Knocked Loose, all this shit, right? So, when we play, 50 percent of our crowd are people that were absolutely not around, not just for Dillinger, but also for Every Time I Die. That's fucking really incredible. And I'm not lost on the fact that that is because whatever we're doing together at this very moment is more than the sum of the parts from 20 years ago."

We spoke to Buckley and Puciato about the joy of being Better Lovers, and the fury it took to create *Highly Irresponsible*.

DEW IT TO IT
MOUNTain
DEW

JORDAN BUCKLEY

"What have I been up to today?" Jordan Buckley echoes when *Revolver* asks how his day's treated him so far. He's perfectly happy to tell us everything. He had therapy earlier, and did his daily meditation ritual. In a brief moment of show-and-tell over Zoom, the guitarist demonstrates some of his meditative chants — before he points the camera to a device that he's connected to a pair of headphones, which he explains is part of an experimental treatment for his tinnitus.

As the conversation progresses, he remains an open book. Buckley doesn't believe anything, including the rather fraught aftermath of Every Time I Die's split, should be off the table for discussion.

"I feel like if anybody's going to do an interview, and they're like, 'Don't ask me about this, don't ask me about this' — *those* are the things that [they] need to deal with," he says. "Give someone a list of things to not talk about, and that would be the exact same list I would take to my therapist and go, 'OK, we have to deal with all these things.'" Naturally, however, he's more excited to lift the lid on the project that exists in the here and now: Better Lovers.

If life was fair — and if the internet wasn't such a swamp of vitriol and ego — those clamoring for an ETID reunion would listen when Buckley says the best thing for all parties is the environment of peace and creativity Better Lovers affords him.

"I'm here to make myself happy from now on," he asserts. "And guess what? When I'm happy, you're going to be happy too."

YOU AND THE REST OF THE BAND SEEM SO EXCITED ABOUT THE MUSIC COMING OUT. DOES IT STILL FEEL LIKE BETTER LOVERS ARE IN THE HONEYMOON PHASE?
JORDAN BUCKLEY I think it's better than the hypothetical honeymoon phase, because now it feels smoother. Getting it off the ground had challenges, not to mention that the songs are incredibly difficult to play. But now, the wheels are greased. Everything is smoother. I almost feel like we're in cruise control right now, because of how much hard work went into the beginning, and the writing and the recording. We're more comfortable playing the songs, we're more comfortable onstage — and so now we get to enjoy it.

ARE THESE NEW SONGS THE MOST COMPLEX YOU'VE WRITTEN? WAS THERE A PARTICULAR REASON THEY'RE MORE DIFFICULT TO EXECUTE LIVE? Will is just a superior guitar player to me. This is no disrespect, at all, to anyone I've played guitar with in the past, but Will is the best guitar player I know. When you surround yourself with [better players] you have no choice but to become better yourself — and you enjoy it. You embrace the learning and the growing. You want to be the best at what you do, you want to perfect your craft. If I can work alongside people who are constantly perfecting theirs, it's only natural for it to trickle down to me. This band is open to allowing us all to show off in our own way.

WHAT ELSE MAKES BETTER LOVERS SO SATISFYING TO BE A PART OF? We are so mentally on the same frequency, whether it's jokes, ideas, plans or strategies. There's such a complete lack of resistance when you can be yourself and absolutely trust and respect everyone on your team. We just all want each other to succeed. We want this band to succeed. We want everyone to succeed in their personal lives. Maybe it's the wisdom that comes with experience, or age — or just the fact that we've been doing this for so long. Maybe it's a lot of trial and error, but that peace of mind is just the most important thing you could possibly have in life. It's like,

GABE BECERRA

Holy shit, we got fucking magic here. Let's not let this slip through our hands. Let's do whatever we can to get as much juice out of the lemon as we can. We deserve this. We're enjoying this because we know we've put the miles in — and now is our time to reap the benefits of what we've sown for the last couple of decades.

YOU'VE DONE MUSIC FOR MANY YEARS NOW, BUT YOU'RE BACK AT THE DEBUT ALBUM STAGE. HOW DOES IT FEEL TO HAVE THAT CLEAN SLATE? I do artwork on the side, and I get a lot of my job offers through the internet — so I kind of had no choice but to see everything that people were sending me when Every Time I Die broke up. It was just so evil and demonic and unacceptable. But I was able to twist it. If I'm being told that there's only going to be 10 people at our next show, that means if there's 11, then I win. A year before Better Lovers existed, I was being told Better Lovers sucks. I wish I could say it never had an effect on me, but it took some work to make sure that the effect was a positive one.

Following up *Radical* [Every Time I Die's final record in 2021], which everyone loved so much, *that* would have been pressure. If the band actually was able to ride off in the sunset and not have such a cringy fucking meltdown of a break-up… and people were expecting big things out of me and Stephen and Goose's next band — that would have been pressure. But I got the best of both worlds.

DID YOU GO INTO MAKING *HIGHLY IRRESPONSIBLE* WITH ANY PARTICULAR VISION IN MIND? We were just more excited to have an album that everyone was involved in from the ground up. That was when we kind of knew, OK, this is going to take on its own personality. We know people are going to look at the members, and our resumes are going to pop into people's heads. But I think we're doing a really good job, so far, of giving Better Lovers its own personality. I know, for a fact, this is different than anything I've ever done — and I know that everyone else in the band feels the same way about themselves. I'm such a fan of Greg and Will, and it was just such an honor to be able to write and record and work with them.

We lived at Will's because he's got a studio in his house — and we would record from the time we woke up to the time we went to bed. You're exercising in the garage, but you're listening to demos while you're doing it. I'd sneak off and meditate once or twice a day. But as I'm meditating, I can't help but be excited about the seed that's growing into a plant. I wasn't just learning the songs. I was learning new ways to write songs, compose songs, prep songs for vocals — and use the equipment, the hardware, the software. And to top it all off, you're doing it with the people that you genuinely think are the funniest people in the world, who want nothing but peace and happiness for you. It was the best situation I could have asked for.

DESPITE THE POSITIVITY SURROUNDING BETTER LOVERS, THERE'S STILL A SENSE OF FURY TO THE ALBUM — HOW DID YOU TAP INTO THAT RAGE? I am a positive person, but I'm *actively* positive. I don't just float through life. I have rituals and routines that I do to keep me this way. One thing I didn't realize — I guess, because I never really had to — is when you're playing angry music, it's a healthy way to deal with your anger. As I learned in therapy this morning, there is healthy anger [that] keeps you out of situations that you shouldn't be in. I think a very healthy release of anger is playing angry music, which is why I was always so in love with my job. I really fucking enjoyed playing angry music because it kept me *not* angry, and I didn't really realize this until it got taken away from me. I needed somewhere new to put it — because after Every Time I Die broke up, I was extremely angry. I mean, anger is one of the stages of grief, too. The band was murdered — sorry to put it so bluntly, but it was. I wrote some of the angriest stuff, and I just put it in [Better Lovers'] music. That's where it comes from.

GREG PUCIATO

The joke among those who know him is that Greg Puciato runs on his own time zone: GPT, as he refers to it. He's not so much a night owl as he is borderline nocturnal — especially on tour like he is now — and as such, he's quite happy to chat about music at 3 a.m. outside his hotel.

Puciato's calendar is filled with Better Lovers gigs across the United States for the back end of 2024, but at this moment in time, he's out with Jerry Cantrell doing backing vocals. He's been at this gig for several years now, doing the sort of dream job that would send his teenage self running around screaming in excitement. "Jerry is one of my best friends on the planet," he says. "In my whole life, there's maybe five, maybe less, people who have been better friends with me than Jerry Cantrell."

Pivoting from frontman to backing vocalist has been an informative experience for Puciato. "[I learned] I wasn't as good of a singer as I thought I was," he admits. "When you sing next to Jerry, you realize that he is a pitch-perfect singer. He happens to play guitar, but he's an incredible singer and he never hits a bad note. When you're harmonizing with someone like that, the second something goes wrong, you're aware that it's you — it's not him. He didn't fuck up 'Man in the Box.' He didn't fuck up 'Rooster' — *you* fucked it up."

Once he's wrapped the Cantrell tour, Puciato will be back in the front seat again with Better Lovers. And just like his bandmate, Jordan Buckley, he's understandably quite excited to grab the reins.

WHAT IS IT THAT MAKES BETTER LOVERS SUCH A FULFILLING PROJECT FOR YOU TO BE A PART OF?

GREG PUCIATO Jordan came to a Jerry Cantrell show we were playing in Vegas, and I was like, Oh, shit, I haven't fucking seen Jordan in a really long time. He was like, "Hey, Every Time I Die broke up, me and Goose and Mitch have got some demos and we don't really have any other singer in mind except for you." I was like, "Jesus Christ, man, you know, that's a lot of pressure." I thought that my schedule was full. I was very content with doing solo shit and [performing with] Jerry, and I didn't want to go backwards. I didn't want to do Dillinger Escape Plan meets Every Time I Die — lowest common denominator — that's not interesting to me.

Jordan sent me the songs, and when I heard them — after eight years or so of not making a Dillinger record — I realized that I was not the same person that I was when I made those last Dillinger records. I don't have the same well to draw from, emotionally, stylistically. It's not just Greg from Dillinger meets Every Time I Die, there's this other possibility, right? I still thought that maybe it was just going to be a release — just an EP or an album — [when] I agreed to do it. Then the interesting thing that happened was that, almost immediately, our audience seemed to be more than the sum of the parts. It didn't seem like it was just Dillinger Escape Plan meets Every Time I Die. It seemed like something else was going on, whether it was the name or the aesthetic or the merch or this fucking frog mascot that we have. It was just so unusual and unique. It's just become its own thing.

GABE BECERRA

A LOT CAN HAPPEN IN A DECADE. WHAT ARE THE MAIN WAYS IN WHICH YOU'VE CHANGED? Writing is a reflection of life, and when you write music or lyrics it has to come from a real place. I'm not a genre fan. I don't listen to any bands that sound like Dillinger Escape Plan or Every Time I Die — I've never even heard a full record of theirs. I don't advocate that anyone should listen to Dillinger Escape Plan. I selfishly make music because it's something that I need to do, to get out of me. So, nine years ago for me as a human being… Psychologically, I'm *nowhere* close to that person [I was on the last Dillinger record]. So, when we started making this record, it's not just about like, Can I still scream? It's about, Do I have anything to *say* in this realm? Screaming should be about intensity. So, do I really have anything to say that warrants having exclamation points at the end of it? If otherwise, I'm a fucking fraud — and I'm causing a problem. Either I have exclamation points or I don't.

SO HOW DID YOU MANAGE TO FIGURE OUT WHAT YOU WANTED TO SAY? It's very difficult, right? Back when Dillinger was going on and I was writing from that perspective, I was very depressed. I had a lot of anxiety. I had a lot of frustration and a lot of anger, and I don't have that anymore. I'm not that person. I've overcome all that. My biggest fear was being a fraud. What I don't want to do is put on a costume and be writing lyrics from a perspective of another time, or another person. I really had to dig to find whatever was left in there to be pissed about, to be depressed about, to be angry about, to be energetic about. Some of that might mean putting yourself in someone else's shoes, or writing from someone else's perspective. You do what you got to do to get the material out. And for me, it was just about not being fake. All I can tell you is that everything I wrote about is real — but everything I wrote about was very difficult to get to at the same time. I don't have as much in that tank as I did when I was in my twenties or early thirties.

IF THAT'S THE CASE, WHAT MIGHT THAT MEAN FOR THE LIFESPAN OF BETTER LOVERS? Why do I need to think about the next record? I'm not a careerist. I don't need to worry about that. I do what I do because it's honest. I think the people that care about me care because I'm honest. I'm not trying to be a fucking cartoon character. When you're young, you start a band, and you're like, "We're going to be the biggest band in the world." You have all these careerist goals. As you get older, you start to hone in more on who you are as an artist. And if you're worth a fuck as an artist, you start to make decisions based on being more artistic and less commercial. You're willing to say, "Hey, I'm not going to be what you knew me as three years ago, because I'm this now." And I don't know who I'm going to be in three years. I don't know who Jordan's going to be in three years. I don't know who Will, Mitch or Goose are going to be in three years. Maybe it won't yield anything. Maybe this is the only album we have. Who fucking knows? Maybe we have five more. I don't know. But every album has to be the real intersection of us, or else you're a fucking product. I have no interest in trying to chase the dragon of commerciality. All I know is I love our record. In two or three years, whatever we write together is going to be genuine, too — or else it's just not going to happen.

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THE

WARNING

TEXT **Emma Madden**

This trio of Mexican sisters grew up with vivid rock-star dreams. The reality of achieving them has been much harder – and far better – than they ever imagined.

THE WARNING'S FIRST-EVER SHOWS WERE ELECTRIC.

THEY ROARED ONTO THE STAGE, PLUGGED IN THEIR instruments, and began to play their hearts out. It was a HOT START! The crowd was screaming for more. Pau thrashed at her drums. Dany mastered her combo of riffs. They were STAR POWER READY! Dany tilted her guitar upward and lightning shot out from it. YOU ROCK! When the song ended, Pau put down her sticks, Dany her guitar and the Villarreal sisters turned off the console. The screen went dark, and dinner was ready: "Kids, time to eat."

Daniela (Dany), Paulina (Pau) and Alejandra (Ale) Villarreal — three sisters who grew up in mountain-fringed Monterrey, Mexico — played the *Rock Band* video game every single day between school and dinner. "That game gave us our first idea of what a rock star was," says Dany today from the Warning's tour bus. From *Rock Band*, they also learned a catalog of classic-rock anthems — from Aerosmith to AC/DC and beyond — and forged their dreams around the salvation those riffs seemed to promise. Dany, the oldest, went straight for the guitar. Pau, the middle child, picked up the drumsticks, while Ale, who was then too young to really understand what was going on, danced around them. They were eight, six and three when they first started playing. "The game portrayed these people, these rock stars, as totally free — and free to express themselves," Dany reflects.

For so many kids raised in the mid-Aughts, the idea of what constituted a rock star came from that same game. Then, if these kids went on to pick up the actual instruments, they'd soon learn that real guitars cause blisters and calluses. Drums leave splinters. The bass is heavy and requires a lot of patience. What the game also left out was how utterly exhausting it is to be a rock star.

Speaking to *Revolver* while traveling between a stacked schedule of shows across Europe, the Warning are tired. This isn't the lifestyle *Rock Band* promised. It's actually way better. But, Dany says, "If you want to survive it, you have to be disciplined. It's how we give our best at every show."

Now in their early twenties — and over halfway through the busiest year of their career thus far — the Warning are living their *Rock Band* dreams, with all the hard-worn reality that entails. There are few acts today who really embody what we traditionally think of as a rock star. But the Warning are *it* — and they're proudly presenting that reinvigorated rock & roll archetype to a whole new generation of global fans.

Earlier this summer, they released *Keep Me Fed*, their fourth and hardest studio album to date. The record's stadium-rock influences — Muse, Royal Blood and Halestorm — embroidered lovingly on its sleeve: from the heavy grooves of the infectious "MORE" to the big riffs and radio-ready hooks of "Hell You Call a Dream" to the anthemic melodies of "S!CK." Since then, the Warning have experienced a huge upsurge in interest, demand and popularity. They've accrued millions of streams, hundreds of thousands of new followers and fans, and covered the world almost once over while on tour. They've been a mainstay on the festival circuit, having played Rocklahoma, Riot Fest and Download. And, for at least the past couple of years, they've been the go-to support act for some of rock's biggest names: Foo Fighters, Muse and Guns N' Roses, among others. They've also earned cosigns from their heroes, including huge support from Metallica on the back of their breakout viral cover of "Enter Sandman."

Nowadays, the Warning are pretty hard to get a hold of. *Revolver* caught them briefly right before they hit the stage at the Steelhouse Festival in muddy Wales. Then, we chatted again while they were on the road.

OPENING SPREAD: SHUN ITABA; OPPOSITE PAGE: BROOKE JAMES

The Warning, (from left) Ale Villarreal, Pau Villarreal and Dany Villarreal

We found them totally beat — but in good spirits. "You learn to grab energy from other places, but we are perpetually tired," says Pau.

This could be the perfect recipe for sororicide: three frazzled sisters cooped up on a bus together — traveling, traveling, traveling, no end in sight. But in fact, the Villarreals have never felt closer. "Our relationship as sisters is just great," says Pau. "And to be growing next to each other as businesswomen, as artists, as creatives, as writers, as musicians — I feel very lucky to see my sisters grow alongside me in the way that we do." When the road gets too tough, they lean on this singular bond. "It's always really comforting to know that as sisters, we go through everything together," adds Ale. "We went through *all* of this together."

And it all began with one slim, rectangular present.

Rock Band was a gift from the sisters' father to Pau for her sixth birthday. It was he who also eventually encouraged them to pick up the real thing. Their father noticed an unusual charisma from Dany when she played guitar and sang into the plastic microphone, ditto for Pau, who drummed with a steady control and tempo that seemed to come instinctively.

Shortly after those first *Rock Band* jams, the two older sisters attended a summer camp and played *real* musical instruments, at length, for the very first time. When they came home, they each picked up piano lessons and began performing tunes as far-ranging as the *Barney & Friends* soundtrack to AC/DC numbers. The sisters were quick learners. They each practiced in isolation, taking up music as a separate vocation. They eventually joined forces the following winter, when the school's Christmas music festival gave Dany and Pau the idea to play together. After months of rehearsing in separate rooms, they finally shared a space — and they shared their songs. The pair built on one another's ideas innately, as only sisters can, and soon transformed into a solid musical unit.

Becoming a family band wasn't part of the plan. These were kids, there was no plan. There were just toys and dinners and games and school and friends. That was life — until music overshadowed it all.

When Ale was old enough to develop enough hand-eye coordination, she joined her older sisters on bass. They practiced every spare moment they had. When one of them fumbled, they communicated calmly and directly. They started over. And over. And over.

They naturally leaned into rock early on, copying the movements they'd seen on the *Rock Band* game. They covered just about every staple you could think of, then recorded them and uploaded the result to YouTube — sharing the link with only a close pool of friends. There was one cover, in particular, that contained an unusual display of verve and mastery: the trio's take on Metallica's "Enter Sandman."

Not long after uploading the video, in 2014, the view count climbed. These weren't just their close friends watching. These were hundreds, then thousands, then hundreds of thousands of strangers sitting back in awe as three young kids shredded the hell out of a song they'd come to know intimately.

MEDIOS Y MEDIA/GETTY IMAGES

MEDIOS Y MEDIA/GETTY IMAGES

The Villarreal sisters understood the concept of virality, sort of. Each member of the band is a digital native, meaning that they've never known life without the internet. They'd seen this sort of thing happen to a bunch of unsuspecting kids. But they never imagined it would happen to them. "We couldn't fully grasp what going viral meant," says Pau. "But all those views meant that we started getting attention — and a lot more opportunities and interviews and stuff like that."

The video reached 20 million views and eventually found its way to Metallica's Kirk Hammett, who said that the girls kicked "maximum ass." He later invited them to reprise their cover — with a vocal assist from pop singer Alessia Cara — for 2021's *The Metallica Blacklist*, the band's officially endorsed Black Album cover record. "None of this would have actually happened if it wasn't for the internet," says Ale. "The internet can be a double-edged sword — but when used correctly, it can really just make your dreams come true."

The sisters first caught the world's attention when they were just 14, 12 and 9 years old. "While people our age were going to school and doing normal things, we were growing up in the spotlight," says Pau. "And the fun part was that we were doing it together. I feel like maybe if we would have been alone in it, it would have been very different."

> "We couldn't fully grasp what going viral meant. But we started getting attention — and a lot more opportunities."
> — Pau Villarreal

That dream began to kindle right after the viral success of their initial "Enter Sandman" cover. The first step, they decided with their parents, would be to attend a five-week summer course at the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston. But that was a lot of dollars, and a lot of miles, away. As luck would have it, a showrunner from *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* discovered the sisters' "Enter Sandman" video and learned of their Berklee goal, which they were trying to achieve via a crowdfunding campaign. The Warning were eventually invited to perform on the show — the hot lights of Hollywood shining on them, their online buzz transforming into real-world energy. The trio heard the audience clapping, and felt the excitement

"Opening for Guns N' Roses in our hometown — I can't believe it, but that happened."
— Dany Villarreal

as the cheering escalated during their performance. These were real people watching them. Not just numbers on a screen. With the show's help (including a $30,000 donation from its sponsors), the sisters met their crowdfunding goals and headed to Berklee.

There, they were encouraged to make the transition from performing covers to writing originals. "It was a challenge set to us by a music professor called Pablo González," says Dany. "He's a great bass player. He was like, 'Hey, why don't you start writing songs? Let's just try this out.'" The sisters took to the challenge like it was another game, just one of their fun activities. Their school music teachers helped them record their early songs. They put them up in a tiny studio — and the girls tracked what would become the Warning's debut EP, 2015's *Escape the Mind*. "We were so excited to have that experience, we didn't even know if we would release it," Dany recalls. "In the end we just thought, Why not?" In a full-circle moment, the makers of *Rock Band* had learned of the Warning's early years playing the game, and included the EP's "Free Falling" in *Rock Band 4*.

The next dream: release their very first album. Still wishing to do everything themselves, they created a GoFundMe campaign to raise funds, and quickly established an intimate rapport with their fans. Before long, they raised $20,630, an amount that would get them into a much more substantial studio with a professional team. "Our parents really helped us with the business side of things," says Pau. "We were just kids, so we had no idea what was going on."

They dropped two independently funded and released albums, 2017's *XXI Century Blood* and 2018's *Queen of the Murder Scene*, before deciding to take things up a notch. By that point, their viral popularity had caught the attention of several different labels. And in 2020, they signed a five-record deal with Universal Music Group's Lava/Republic Records, making them the first Mexican group to ever do so — in fact, the first Mexican band to ever sign with a major U.S. label imprint.

"We were an independent band for almost seven years, and we wanted to take advantage of any opportunity that would allow us to go [to the next level]," says Pau. With Lava/Republic's support, the Warning unleashed 2021's *Mayday* EP, which was closely followed by the 2022 full-length *Error*. "We were really lucky to find Lava," adds Ale. "We always want to go higher and be better — and our label works hard alongside us."

The signing brought the Warning into closer contact with their heroes. If you were at some of the biggest rock shows in 2022 and 2023, chances are you saw the Warning opening. At the beginning of 2023, they supported Muse, Foo Fighters and Halestorm. "Touring with legends, our biggest idols since we were kids, taught us so much," says Dany. Soon, they were walking red carpets, becoming a household name on TikTok and turning into a certified act. Their star, very quickly, rose.

September 2023 was a banner month for the band. They performed at the MTV Music Video Awards in New York, before flying to Florida to support Guns N' Roses. It was the second time they opened for the hard-rock icons, after a surreal 2022 show in the Warning's home city of Monterrey. "Opening for Guns N' Roses in our hometown — oh, my God, I can't believe I just said that, but yes, *that happened*," Dany recalls of that first gig. "It was amazing. We had so much fun."

Time has sped up exponentially for the sisters. The first half of 2024 has been a snowball of tours, events and appearances that's quickly turning into an avalanche. "We've noticed very significant changes," says Dany, of the amount of attention they're now receiving, "especially since the new album came out."

"But more than anything," adds Pau, "as we start getting these new opportunities at this level, we push each other harder, to go *above* the level. That's what we pride ourselves in: being good musicians, giving good performances. So as the stakes are higher and there is more pressure and more eyes watching us, we feel super motivated to be the best we can be."

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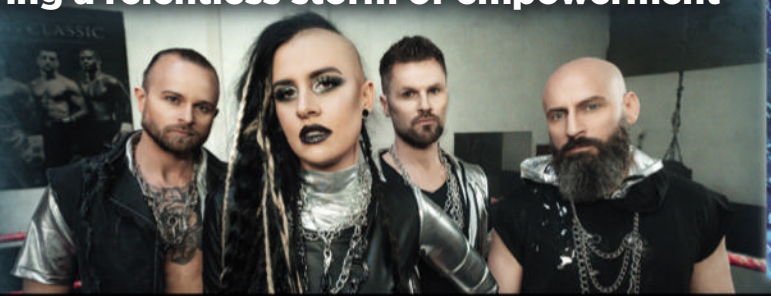

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Ice-T's long-running metal outfit has courted controversy since day one, but the singer-rapper-actor is only getting more merciless with age

TEXT
Dan Epstein

PHOTOGRAPHY
Jesse Korman

BODY COUNT

BODY COU

SOUTH CENTRAL

"We're not a metal band that's trying to scare you, like we're gonna burn down churches and shit. If we are gonna burn a church, it's gonna be funny."
— Ice-T

"I ACT FOR THE MONEY – AND I DO MUSIC TO REMAIN SANE," SAYS ICE-T. "I THINK every human being needs to do something that's 100 percent *them*, whether it's cooking, whether it's painting, whatever. And at the end of the day, I'm a songwriter, you know?"

Since 2000, the groundbreaking rapper has made a comfortable career for himself as Sergeant Odafin "Fin" Tutuola on NBC's *Law & Order: Special Victims Unit*, the longest-running prime-time live-action series on American television. But while many musicians-turned-actors in the same position might be inclined to just coast on their good fortune, the man born Tracy Marrow continues to go hard behind the microphone.

Merciless, the eighth and latest album from his even longer-running metal band Body Count, more than lives up to its name. Produced by longtime collaborator Will Putney (Fit for an Autopsy, Better Lovers) and arriving via Century Media, the album finds Ice and his Body Count crew — guitarist Ernie C, sampler/backup vocalist Sean E Sean, bassist Vincent Price, drummer Ill Will, rhythm guitarist Juan of the Dead and Ice's hype-man son Little Ice — blazing through uncompromising tracks like "The Purge," "Drug Lords" and "Fuck What You Heard," with a little help from friends and family.

Max Cavalera, Howard Jones (Light the Torch), Fit for an Autopsy's Joe Badolato and Cannibal Corpse's George "Corpsegrinder" Fisher all lend their voices to the record — as do Ice's wife Coco Austin and their eight-year-old daughter Chanel, who shriek up a storm on the cartoonishly gory "Psychopath." And then there's Pink Floyd's David Gilmour, who reprises his iconic guitar solos on a thoughtful reworking of Floyd's 1980 hit single "Comfortably Numb."

Through it all, Ice sounds as intense and engaged as ever — fronting Body Count is clearly as much fun for him these days as it was back in 1990, when he and Ernie C founded the band. "When I act, I'm really just trying to take that character that the writer or director imagined, and make it believable," he explains. "But when I do music, I walk into an empty room and create it from ground up — it's a whole 'nother thing.

"And then performing music is a *whole 'nother* energy that a lot of my actor friends envy," he continues. "Because on a set or in the theater, you're sticking to a script. With live music, you could just stop and say, 'I feel like taking a shit onstage!' — and have 50,000 people scream, 'Take a shit!'" He laughs. "It's truly spontaneous. There's *nothing* like it."

IT'S BEEN NEARLY 35 YEARS SINCE YOU STARTED BODY COUNT. DID YOU HAVE ANY IDEA BACK THEN THAT THE BAND WOULD HAVE THIS KIND OF LONGEVITY?

ICE-T Oh, absolutely not. I mean, Body Count was created as a side band just for fun — to let Ernie play guitar — and we never really realized we were going to make albums or anything like that. It was something I was doing on the side. We started off playing pizza joints in L.A. and little gigs like that. But when we played Lollapalooza [in 1991], that's when we really knew it had legs. We were like, "Oh shit — a *lot* of people are digging it!" [*Laughs*] And, you know, it just keeps on, man. It's a very interesting band. I mean, we've gone through a lot of incarnations — we've lost members, and it just keeps on.

HAS THE PROCESS OF WRITING AND MAKING MUSIC CHANGED A LOT SINCE BODY COUNT'S SELF-TITLED DEBUT IN 1992? Well, absolutely, it's changed. You know, after we lost D-Roc [the band's original rhythm guitarist, who died in 2004] and Moose [the band's original bassist, who died in 2001] and all them, we were having a lot of trouble trying to figure it out. We didn't even know if we were going to make another record. Our drummer Beatmaster V [who died in 1996] was the leader — he was the one that made everyone get to rehearsal. So, someone had to take that part of the band. I can't play instruments, so the *band* has to connect. When they do rehearsals, it's just the band rehearsing music — and you have to have somebody who will drive that. So, Vincent Price took that role [when he joined in 2001]. He's the guy that holds the band together.

So that was the first part that was missing. Then Vince brought in Juan. Juan is a journeyman metal guitarist from Evildead, and Juan had the connection to Sumerian Records. And [in 2012], Sumerian said, "We'll give you guys a budget to make an album." They also introduced us to Will Putney. Will Putney is the linchpin. Will Putney is like a super-producer who can produce pretty much any kind of rock you want. He came over to my house in New Jersey and said, "I totally understand Body Count. I know what you guys are doing. It's hardcore, but it's got humor. It's outrageousness." I'm like, "Oh yeah, you *got* this shit!" We're not a metal band that's trying to scare you, like we're gonna burn down churches and shit like that. If we *are* gonna burn down a church, it's gonna be funny. [*Laughs*]

So Will came in, and that's when we got the second wind. We went from *Manslaughter* [2014] to *Bloodlust* [2017] to *Carnivore* [2020], and now here we are at *Merciless*. You gotta really have a good, cohesive crew to keep making good records. You can't just jump from place to place to place to place. Doesn't work like that.

Body Count, (from left) Ill Will, Ernie C, Vincent Price, Sean E Sean, Ice-T and Juan of the Dead

WHAT'S WORKING WITH WILL PUTNEY LIKE? Well, Will Putney, I call him the Dr. Dre of metal, because he has the ability to produce different bands but make them all sound the way they *should* sound. He makes them sound the best at what they do. We don't sound like Fit for an Autopsy. We don't sound like Better Lovers, Will's new band. But if we want it dark, he knows how to get that sound. Because at the end of the day, this is a sonic medium, right? You could write the best songs in the world, but if that producer can't make it come through those headphones the way you want it, it's gonna suck.

Will knows how to make the record sound intense and loud, and then he understands me. When we did "Psychopath," I'm like, "I need some screams. I'm gonna have Coco and Chanel scream in the bathroom." He's like, "Yeah!" And then I come back and hear it, and he's like, "I put this buzz saw on here." You have to have somebody that really understands what the band is — you know, if I'm gonna go produce GWAR, I have to truly *understand* GWAR — and he understands. And as far as his ear, it's unmatched, you know? The records just keep sounding better and better.

YOU MENTIONED HOW THE BAND GETS TOGETHER FIRST TO WORK ON MUSIC. DO THE GUYS COOK UP THE TRACKS AND THEN SEND THEM OVER TO YOU? Absolutely. That's how we work. The band starts making riffs — they're in L.A., so they go into rehearsal and start coming up with ideas. Then they send me ideas — not songs, *ideas* — and I listen to them, and I'll go, "That sucks. That sounds like somebody else's shit." Or I'll go, "Yo, the breakdown right there, make a record out of *that*." And then when we start to get the song together, I sit with the track. I put on the headphones and I just *vibe*. This might sound real "artistic," but the track starts to tell me what it's about. [*Laughs*] When I heard "Psychopath," I'm like, "This sounds like the inside of an insane person's mind!" And that's the way it was written.

HOW DID THE "COMFORTABLY NUMB" COVER COME ABOUT? I always dug the bassline to "Comfortably Numb." The bassline reminded me of [composer] Giorgio Moroder, the last scene in *Scarface* — that very thematic stuff. Now, there's a part in the real "Comfortably Numb" where it goes [*sings the pre-chorus melody*] — I took that out. I just like the bassline.

I thought about it, like, You know what? We *are* comfortably numb right now. There's two fucking wars going on, probably many more, and we just turn the channel and watch sports. We're not connected to what's really going on in the world. Like I say in the song, "You got a TV, a computer, so you don't care… You lock yourself in a house, try to forget about the millions dyin' from war, starvation and drought." It's like we're numb to violence. We're numb to every fucking thing that's going on. So I just tried to write some real shit, you know? I wrote about my life. I wrote about me getting old. I wrote about how I feel about us as humans — like, if there's a God looking at us, we're a piece of shit to him right now, because we're fighting over race, we're fighting over religion…

So I write it, we make the record and we send it to Pink Floyd. And one of their publishers said, "No. They don't do covers. They don't do samples." You know, like, this is fucking *Pink Floyd* motherfucker, they don't do this! So, it was shot down. Everybody's like, "Well, just change it." I said, "Nah, the record dies with this. It's an idea. It's a concept. I'm not going to do another bassline. I'm not going to change the hook. It's dead."

Then my manager, Jorge, he reached out to David Gilmour's manager, because somehow he knew somebody who knew somebody. And when David Gilmour heard the song, he goes, "Fuck yeah! I want to *play* on this record!" And then when Roger Waters heard it, all he was concerned with was who was singing, which is me, and both of the guys signed off on it. I know Roger's got his own point of view

ALESSANDRO SOLCA

about things, but I was able to be so right down the middle with this song — it's just talking about us as humans, and you can't deny what I'm saying on the record — that I could get two people with different views to say, "Yeah, this is a good song."

So, David wants to play on the record, and says, "Just send me the track." He goes in the studio, and he lays this shit down. Then we're like, "OK, dope. We got this shit done!" But then we're like, "What are we gonna do for a video?" David's like, "I'll be in the video." So, we sent a camera crew over [to England] and filmed him playing. We're gonna make it look like a recording session: I'm gonna get my guys in the studio playing, with me behind the mic, and put it together with David fucking Gilmour playing on the Body Count record — which is the dopest shit in the world.

And the thing of it is, I performed the record on tour. I closed the show with it, and it *works*. I set it up by saying, "You know, every year we pay homage to a group that we're inspired by. We've done Suicidal [Tendencies], we've done Slayer, we did Motörhead." I said, "How will I fuck you guys up *this* year? How about some…" and I pause, "Pink Floyd?" And the crowd goes, "What?!?" [*Laughs*] And it's like, *boom*, we hit 'em with that first note. Ernie's playing [the solo] when we play live — and it kills!

I KNOW YOU GO WAY BACK WITH THE ROCK STUFF. WERE YOU LISTENING TO PINK FLOYD'S *THE WALL* WHEN IT CAME OUT IN 1979? Yeah, I was definitely in tune with all that, and that's how come I know about this song. Another thing with Body Count is, I never wanted to pigeonhole us to one sound. So, we kind of do punk. We'll do some speed metal, some thrash. We'll do some Black Sabbath-ish things. But it fits — it fits with *us*. And what I talk about [in "Comfortably Numb"] is 100 percent Body Count, without bastardizing their song. I didn't turn it into, like, "Comfortable Buns" or some shit. [*Laughs*] I wouldn't have gotten approved for that!

ALONG WITH FIT FOR AN AUTOPSY'S JOE BADOLATO, WHO I'M SURE WAS A CONNECTION FROM WILL, YOU'VE ALSO GOT MAX CAVALERA, HOWARD JONES AND CORPSEGRINDER ON THE NEW RECORD. HOW DID THOSE GUYS GET INVOLVED? Everybody that's on a Body Count record has become a friend of Body Count. We only fuck with people we like. Pink Floyd was really our farthest reach. Most everyone else, Howard and all them, they're in our circle. We'll get to a point in the song where we're like, "Yo, you know who would sound dope right here?" When you can find the right person for the right song and they fit — like, "Corpsegrinder has the right voice for this song!" — that's what music is about. And like you say, Joe is in the studio a lot with us, because we record out of the same place.

LET'S TALK ABOUT YOUR TV CAREER FOR A SECOND. YOU'VE BEEN ON *LAW & ORDER: SPECIAL VICTIMS UNIT* FOR WHAT, ALMOST 25 YEARS NOW? Yeah, I'm the longest-running actor in a continuous TV role. [*Law & Order*'s] Mariska [Hargitay] has me beat as an actress. But yeah — and I [first] went on that show to do four episodes! [*Laughs*]

> "We are comfortably numb right now. There's two fucking wars going on, probably more, and we just turn the channel and watch sports."
> — Ice-T

YOU'VE GOT YOUR SHOW, YOUR MUSIC, YOUR FAMILY AND OTHER PURSUITS. HOW DO YOU JUGGLE IT ALL? Whatever's making the most money is the most important. That's how it starts. So *SVU* is the breadwinner right now — it's been for 25 years, and I'm working five days a week on that. Then on the weekends, I have time to go into the recording studio. Right now, I'm on musical hiatus. I'm not writing anything, because we got this new record coming out. So, I can kind of chill, right? But Will's studio is not far from me. I can go there, and everybody respects my hustle, like, "Well, Ice's time is limited. Let's do this, and let's do that."

Chuck D said, "Ice, at this point, if you're not having fun, you shouldn't do it." You know, I'm really having fun — so I want to do it. And it's amazing what time you can make for shit you *want* to do. But I'm not doing as much as people think. I do *Law & Order*, that's my thing, and now it's really just down to *Law & Order* and Body Count. Those are my two main grinds. I haven't been motivated to do a rap album, even though me and [Naughty by Nature's] Treach did a record together called *Black Cadillac*, which is going to be animated — it's some wild, psychedelic pimp shit.

IT'S BEEN A WHILE SINCE YOU'VE DROPPED A FULL-LENGTH HIP-HOP RECORD. IS IT JUST EASIER, OR MAYBE MORE SATISFYING, TO MAKE BODY COUNT ALBUMS AT THIS POINT? Well, there's more energy behind doing a Body Count record, because you've got members that want you to do a record: "Come on, Ice, we got to do another record!" With Ice-T, if I don't want to do it, there's no one to put pressure on me to do it. I think that if I do another Ice-T record, it'll be because I'll hook up with a producer. It would be probably like me and one person just making tracks. But — and this sounds corny again — this shit requires inspiration. You have to get *inspired*, you know? I mean, I might have to hear somebody's record to be like, "Fuck that — I'm going in the studio!"

See, it's different making records when that's *all* you got — like, if you don't make this record, you don't eat and you're gonna lose your house. That's a whole 'nother thing. And you're not necessarily going to make the best record under that pressure. You're going to start making what the record label wants you to make. So, what *Law & Order* has done for me is: I'm really able to make records like I want to. If the label don't like it, I don't really give a fuck — my lights ain't getting cut off. So not having to work under that pressure is good.

I know if I did another hip-hop album, it would be sick, though. I *know* that. You know, I'm 66 years old. I can outrap these little niggas — like, they can't fuck with me. And also, with hip-hop, it's never aged out — no one's ever seen how long you could really rap. I just came off tour with LL COOL J. He's out there, Chuck is still out there. We're like the oldest rappers, so, when does it stop? I honestly don't think artists ever stop — if you're a real artist. Miles Davis was dope till he died. James Brown was dope till he died. Fucking Mick Jagger's 81! I don't think you lose it, unless you stop — and stop giving a fuck about it. So, you know, I might wait until I'm 70 and write a rap album to shit on all these little motherfuckers. [*Laughs*]

VENDEL

Led by the sons of two Slipknot members, these Iowan upstarts are poised to become leaders in today's new metal scene – just don't dare call them nu-metal

TEXT **Alessandro DeCaro**
PHOTOGRAPHY **Anthony Scanga**

"I don't want to be perceived as a legend or godlike. I want to be perceived as human."
— Griffin Taylor

THERE'S A FAMILIAR ADAGE THAT A BAND HAS THEIR entire life to write their first album and six months to write their second. The Des Moines, Iowa-based heavy-metal quintet Vended take this maxim deeply to heart. "That saying has been in my family forever!" drummer Simon Crahan exclaims from the driver's seat of his truck on a sunny August afternoon. "It's a big deal. Your first album is like having your first kid. My dad even told us this from the beginning."

Crahan's dad is none other than Shawn "Clown" Crahan, one of the percussionists and founding members of the legendary metal collective Slipknot. And that's not Vended's only connection to the Iowa Nine: Vocalist Griffin Taylor is the son of Slipknot's inimitable frontman, Corey Taylor. Vended formed back in 2018, when Crahan and Taylor were just teenagers, and gradually developed their visceral sound over practice sessions in a modest Iowa basement. And while they may have started as a musical family affair by association, it's been the blood, sweat, tears and battle scars that the band — also featuring guitarists Cole Espeland and Connor Grodzicki, and bassist Jeremiah Pugh — have experienced through their own journey that have cemented their bond as they enter young adulthood. Vended are now a full-fledged brotherhood preparing, at last, to unleash their highly anticipated self-titled debut album. The lead-up to this moment has been intense, and the guys are ready to make the most of it.

Over the past six years, Vended have played shows across North America, Europe and South America, sharing stages with Bring Me the Horizon, Avenged Sevenfold, Jinjer and more — and they've had no choice but to grow up and evolve in real-time while on the road. This year is shaping up to be Vended's biggest yet. In support of their full-length debut, this fall they'll join a few dates on Slipknot's 25th anniversary run (where they'll perform ahead of Knocked Loose), before embarking on their first-ever headlining tour with opener Wristmeetrazor. Vended are most definitely making their own waves, and all signs are pointing toward a future in which these guys become dominant players in the new metal scene — just don't make the mistake of calling them nu-metal.

"It's fucking heavy metal!" says Crahan with venomous reproach, when asked if Vended identify with the current revival. "Whoever created the term [nu-metal] is a loser. We're not nu-metal, and I will stand by that until my grave."

"Our purpose is to make music," Taylor firmly adds, "not lead the cattle."

For Vended, the only thing they are trying to revive is the idea of doing your own thing — and not being afraid to express an in-your-face attitude. It's a mindset that Crahan and Taylor have been practicing for some time now, and refining through action and experience. So far, it's been an exciting journey — but certainly not one without its patches of turbulence.

"You know how a pilot gets their stars for how long they have been a pilot?" Crahan posits with a laugh. "I think we needed to earn our stars, as well, to hone in on an album." Despite their musical pedigrees, Vended cut their teeth on the road just like anyone else, and it was not as glamorous as one might expect. "We toured in a van with no AC in Europe during the hottest summer," Crahan continues. "We had no room to sleep — but we had to *earn* the torture to make a disgusting album."

"Disgusting" is a bold, yet fitting adjective to describe Vended's debut record — a labor of love, six years in the making, which spans 13 tracks of unfiltered anger and crushing vulnerability, set to a backdrop of blast beats and unrelenting down-tuned guitar riffs. Produced by Chris Collier (Korn, Prong), *Vended* trades the industry standard of slick modern production for something more abrasive, organic, click-track-free and, ultimately, disgustingly human — which has always been the band's intention.

"We wanted to make a big statement that we can do this shit without [relying] on a computer," Crahan states with confidence. Vended's approach is, in many ways, a middle finger to the modern music-industry landscape, which Crahan considers to be focused on content and marketing first, and songwriting second. "We're brutally honest and don't give a flying fuck about backlash or what anyone else is doing," he continues. "We take this so seriously that we are willing to leave everyone behind while we go to Mars..."

Vended are clearly on a rapid upward trajectory, and it's Taylor's unmistakable vocal performances that are helping their artistic vision take flight. With every guttural scream and melodic hook, the singer presents intense and relatable lyrical themes with such palpable vulnerability that even Crahan admits he still gets goosebumps when he hears them.

Take "Am I the Only One," which finds Taylor baring his soul with lines such as "I don't wanna let you

"We're competitive, and we want this so badly. We are willing to take everyone's throats." — Simon Crahan

down, confessedly/I just wanna find a way to sensibly, depressingly, find clarity/I have nothing left to lose but integrity/It's a vicious cycle of tendency/Will you ever forgive me regrettably?" Or the pummeling track "Nihilism," with hair-raising lyrics that include "Hopeless apathy/Nobody needs me anyway" and "I'm nothing but bullshit DNA/Fucked over with all the cliches" — proving that Taylor is willing to invite listeners into the darkest corners of his psyche without any restrictions.

"Lyrically, this record is about being able to tell *my* story — rather than what everyone else wants to hear," says the singer, who tackles everything from existential dread and painful ruminations on past mistakes to scathing critiques on modern society. "At the same time, though, I wanted to make sure that I was also leaving room for the listener's own story and experiences to be placed into it and be used as some sort of therapy. All I want to do is help people, and maybe be the Tylenol to someone's headache."

While the frontman opts to keep some of the intimate details of the lyrics to himself, Taylor admits that creating *Vended* has helped ease his pain — and also motivate him to try and be the best person possible. "I don't want to be perceived as a legend or godlike," Taylor boldly states. "I want to be perceived as *human*, and not a spectacle." Crahan nods in agreement, adding of Taylor's performance, "I feel the pain, sadness, guilt and regret. And I know everyone is going to feel that, too."

Taylor's expressiveness on the record is so real, raw and emphatic that listeners might assume it's a creative state he can naturally step into when he enters the recording booth. But the artistic process is much more complex for the singer. "I'm the most apathetic, tired and melancholic person you'll ever meet," Taylor confesses. "And then once you meet me in person, I go off like a bullet because of my ADHD. However, when it comes to getting down creatively, I have to get into the [right] mindset to vocalize that emotion and that passion, because 90 percent of the time I'm so fucking tired and apathetic."

The creative relationship between Taylor and Crahan is unique in more ways than one. On the one hand, there appears to be a symbiotic, yin-and-yang dynamic that has evolved significantly over the years — while on the other, there is admittedly an oil-and-water nature to their relationship that has been put to the

Vended, (previous page) Griffin Taylor; (this spread) Jeremiah Pugh, Cole Espeland, Simon Crahan and Connor Grodzicki

test more times than they can count. "When I first joined Vended, I didn't feel that spark immediately," Crahan admits. "Griff and I didn't see eye to eye in the beginning — we both wanted different things. We hung out a lot as kids and then had a bit of a falling out, and when we came back together to form this band, things were a little awkward still."

"It was mostly my fault," Taylor interjects. "I was a little shit growing up."

The singer attributes a few undisclosed "key experiences" as being the catalyst for his personal growth, in which he "learned how to be more attentive and forward-thinking in how I can affect others." Taylor says that these lessons have allowed him to become the leader his band of brothers needed.

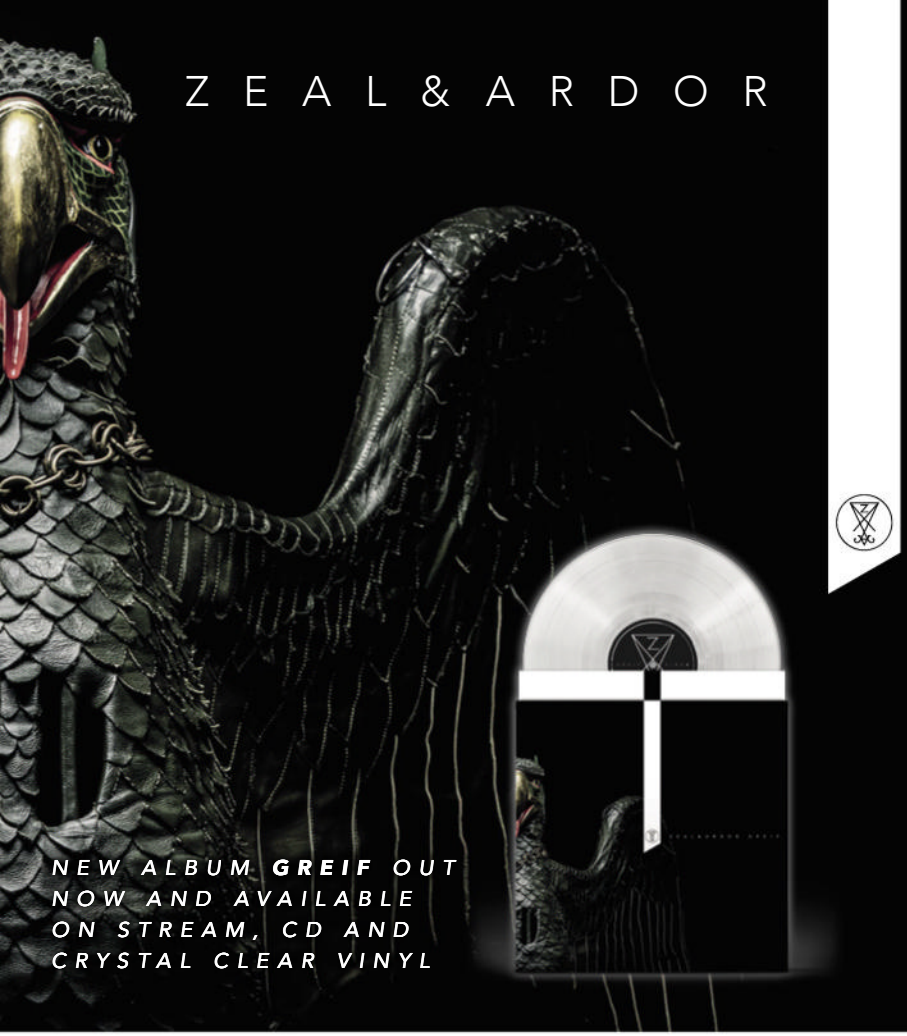
"These changes helped me have the strength [to] put our souls into this fucking Frankenstein of a creature [that is Vended]."

Differences aside, Crahan and Taylor are both pleased to reveal that the writing and recording of Vended's debut album brought the duo closer than ever as friends, first and foremost, allowing them to be on the same page creatively, at last. "I couldn't ask for more," Crahan says with relief.

The term "world domination" often comes up in conversation with Taylor and Crahan, the latter of whom possesses an almost professional boxer mentality, willing and ready to take on any opponent, anytime, anywhere. "It's fucking war," says Crahan, "and though you aren't going to win every time, you still have to fucking try." Crahan and Vended plan to use this tenacious approach as they not only gear up for the release of their debut — but also as they embark on their first-ever headlining tour, in addition to playing the biggest shows of their career with Slipknot. When asked if there are nerves leading up to such massive shows, the pair can't help but laugh at the prospect. The drummer insists that Vended collectively possess the gift of being "stress and anxiety free" when it comes to approaching *any* tour. "We're competitive, and we want this so badly. We are willing to take everyone's throats."

The question is, then: Do Crahan and Taylor see their own fathers as competition? "I'm going to look my dad in the face and be like, 'Hey man, we got *six* mosh pits tonight,'" Crahan says with a laugh. "We aren't going to win against Slipknot's crowd *every* night — but we're certainly going to try our best."

ZEAL&ARDOR



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Twin Temple

Satanic doo-wop duo shares the stories behind their "favorite things on this forsaken earth"

TEXT **John Hill** PHOTOGRAPHY **Travis Shinn**

WHEN THE WORLD'S MOST DIABOLICAL DOO-WOP OUTFIT, TWIN TEMPLE, leave the stage, there's no "off" button for their sinister sensibilities. Upon entering the Los Angeles home of husband-and-wife team Zachary and Alexandra James, you're greeted by a well-curated array of human skeletons, black damask, occult artwork, macabre ephemera, vintage guitars and more. It's a potent mix of darkness, love and creativity, which evokes the feel of an evil *Partridge Family* set.

"We're *very* into [English occultist Aleister] Crowley's ideals of Thelema and living your true will," says Alexandra. "We try to bring our whole true selves — and our most willful version of ourselves — into everything we do."

The duo's commitment to this ideal has taken them to some impressive places. Since forming in 2016, Twin Temple have spread their infectious, unholy message through two full-length albums and high-profile tours supporting two of rock's biggest dark lords: Danzig and Ghost. While their sound draws heavily from '50s and '60s rock & roll, their wicked spirit and decadent, gruesome aesthetic are, most definitely, metal.

"There was no asking ourselves whether putting all of these things together makes sense," says Zachary of their unique style. "It makes *no sense* — but we don't care, because we like all of it: classic American rock & roll, the occult, Dolly Parton, Ronnie Spector. The point is just to follow the muse and do what we want to do."

Twin Temple's do-what-thou-wilt approach to creativity has resulted in a growing collection of alluringly evil, retro-rock songs — including "Burn Your Bible," "Let's Have a Satanic Orgy" and "(Fallin' for a) Fallen Angel," from their most recent album, 2023's *God Is Dead.* This philosophy also naturally informs every other aspect of their lives: from the activities that fill their days to the items that decorate their house.

Ahead of Twin Temple's fall U.S. headlining shows, the pair graciously invited *Revolver* into their home to give us a tour of their most prized possessions — before taking us on a little road trip across L.A. to show off the monstrous car they both covet and the famous studio they love to haunt.

FAVORITE DESECRATED RELIGIOUS BOOK
* Phil and Ronnie Spector's Family Bible

ZACHARY JAMES This came directly from Phil's estate after he passed away [in 2021]. We had to have it. So many artists that we were influenced by — everyone from the Beatles to the Ramones — it's hard not to hear Phil's influence on them.

ALEXANDRA JAMES It's the only Bible we haven't burned. Funny story, but it's so Phil. Phil's birth certificate says he was born on December 26th. But Phil was sort of a huckster. He was really into showmanship and was a pathological liar as well — two sides of the same knife. His whole life, he lied and said his birthday was on Christmas, and I feel like art was born out of this weird battle between Jesus' birthday and his own. We just love the idea that Phil literally lied on the Bible.

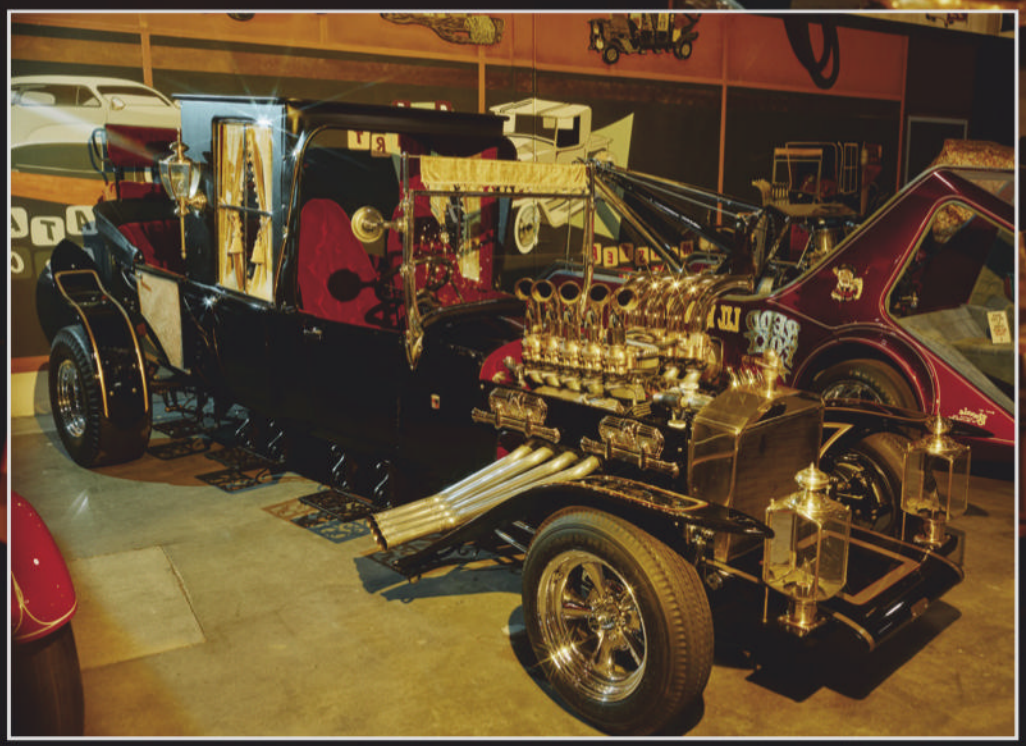
ZACHARY [Car builder/restorer] Dave Shuten has a collection of George Barris cars built in the Sixties — including the Munster Koach [from *The Munsters* sitcom], which we had the privilege of shooting in.

ALEXANDRA Barris was the first [Hollywood custom car builder] to make the cars a character, whether it's the Batmobile or the Munster Koach, and I just love how willfully iconic they are.

ZACHARY Obviously, we're big fans of the TV show. And *The Munsters*' record was recorded by the Wrecking Crew, who were Phil Spector's house band. It's got Glen Campbell on guitar, and Leon Russell on piano, who is just a killer player. So yeah, we have a lot of love for *The Munsters,* and I mean, this car is just so cool.

ALEXANDRA This is what art should be like. It should have this level of vision — even if it's just a car, your vision should extend to everything you do, including the car you drive. Zach and I have been throwing a lot of ideas around for a Twin Temple mobile, which we can't reveal... But there will definitely be cat-eye lights and tail fins.

FAVORITE HOT ROD
* Munster Koach



FAVORITE STUDIO

*** Shooter Jennings' "Snake Mountain" at Sunset Sound Studio 3**

ALEXANDRA This room with the piano is where Prince recorded *Purple Rain.* He supposedly slept next to the piano during the making of it. I really believe certain places accumulate the energy of everyone who's been there and what the space has been used for — I swear, you can just feel the decades of music that's been created there.

ZACHARY Once you walk through those doors, you're in a completely different time and space. And getting to hang out with Shooter Jennings and see what he's working on — it's a magical place for sure.

FAVORITE OCCULT VINYL

* Aleister Crowley and Anton LaVey Records

ALEXANDRA Zach and I have been collecting records for a while. We need to stop — we're running out of space. These are some of my favorites, like this Aleister Crowley 7-inch. It's from 1975 and was the first time they ever released recordings of Crowley's voice, where he's reading two of his poems, "The Pentagram" and "La Gitana."
ZACHARY This Anton LaVey 10-inch is a fun record. He's doing some covers and playing his wacky arsenal of organs and bad synthesizers.
ALEXANDRA I'm sorry, but it's terrible. [*Laughs*] Anytime Zach puts it on the record player, I turn the volume way down. It's awful.
ZACHARY It's a cool record! Whatever. We used to have two copies, and we gave the other to Tobias [Forge] from Ghost as an end-of-tour thank you for having us on. Seemed like a good place for it to go.

FAVORITE "PUG BABY"

* Ziggy

ALEXANDRA He's 15-and-a-half now, which is wild. We've had him literally the entire time we've been together. He is just our baby. He used to tour with us a lot. Now that he's older, it's been really hard leaving him behind — and just seeing him get older. On tour, he'd run around with us backstage. On the bus, he would sneak into the bottom bunk and cuddle up with whoever was sleeping there, even though he had his own bed. He's the love of our life and is basically our child. He was top of the list when we thought of our favorite things on this forsaken earth.
ZACHARY We're going to taxidermy him when he goes, so he'll be sitting like that forevermore.

FAVORITE GUITARS

* Gretsch Billy-Bo and Gibson Les Paul

ZACHARY The Gretsch on the left was designed by Bo Diddley in the Sixties. He gave his guitar to Billy Gibbons, but Billy didn't want to play it. So, he went to Gretsch and asked them to remake it. The shape is really cool and unique, and I've always wanted one. This other one is a Gibson, technically a Les Paul. It was [built] the first year they made this guitar [in 1961]. It was called a Les Paul until they showed it to Les Paul and he said, "Take my name off, I hate it." So, then it became the SG. We did a custom engraving on the tailpiece. Where it normally says Gibson, it says Lucifer, and we added a Lucifer sigil.

FAVORITE MEMENTO MORI
* Collection of Human Skeletons

ALEXANDRA Zach and I are both very Saturnian in nature. We're very obsessed with the past and history, and we're deeply inspired by the Gothic and the macabre. The idea of living the truest expression of yourself while you're alive is really important to us — *memento mori.* And if you're going to buy a skull, it might as well be a real one. They all have their own unique and interesting histories, passed around from different collections. Charles, the full skeleton, came from the Bethlem Royal Hospital, which originated the term "bedlam." He was a patient who passed and ended up at a Masonic lodge where he was used in rituals. There's still black candle wax dripping down the side of his skull.

FAVORITE ROCK-STAR OUTFIT
* Custom Nudie Suits

ALEXANDRA As soon as a rock star made it, they got custom clothes — like the Nudie suits that all the people we grew up loving wore. So as soon as we got our first record advance, we bought suits. And then we had to wear them out for about five years until we could afford new ones. Whether it's the costumes or the music, the idea of craftsmanship and quality is so important to us.

ZACHARY The first ones we ever made are black and red. We designed those — and then gave them to Jerry Atwood of Union Western and he made them. Then we collaborated with another maker RoseCut Clothing, and a woman named Judith [Rothman-Pierce]. She's great. She did the spider-web marabou dress, and the *God Is Dead* set as well.

FAVORITE MEET-CUTE
* Glenn Danzig

ZACHARY So we're at a show at the Roxy in L.A., and Glenn is there. We walk over, and he says, "Hey, nice to meet you, I'm taking you on tour." We thought he was kidding, like, "That'd be cool, we'd love to." But then he's like, "I guess your agent didn't tell you." And *that's* how we found out we would be touring together.

ALEXANDRA We feel really lucky to call him a friend after that tour. We had some really great late-night conversations on the bus about Phil Spector, '60s girl groups and rock & roll. He loves all that old stuff. That tour was just a great time and great memories. And there's actually an Easter egg [next to our signed tour poster].

ZACHARY If you look to the right, there are movie [lobby] cards from [the 1968 film] *The Devil Rides Out.* On the top, there's a photo of a Baphomet character, which is the exact same mask Glenn is wearing in the Danzig poster. He told us he bought [the mask] at an auction.

FAVORITE FAN ART

*** Twin Temple Barbie Dolls**

ALEXANDRA Fans made these incredible dolls. Zach and I love everything in miniature and simulacra in general — that's why we made this puppet show for our Saturnalia Solstice special, where Zach and I shrink and turn into marionettes. It's this odd creative idea that we're really obsessed with. Our fans are so dang creative ... and blow us away with the level of gifts they create. I love all the little details and the little accessories on the doll — it's so cute.

The Greatest Interview Ever!

Serj Tankian

System of a Down's frontman on proudest achievements, worst shows, weirdest gifts and more

TEXT J. Bennett
PHOTOGRAPHY Travis Shinn

FOR SERJ TANKIAN, IT ALL FITS TOGETHER. JUST AS THE SYSTEM OF A DOWN frontman's new memoir, *Down With the System*, recalls his life in the band, as a solo artist (in music and painting) and as a political activist, his new solo EP, *Foundations*, is comprised of material from his past. "All of this stuff was written a long time ago, and most of it was recorded a long time ago as well," he tells *Revolver*. "I cleaned it up and added a few things, but I kept a lot of it the same, because the archival quality and experience was, for me, important for the songs."

Both the memoir and EP were released this year, just a few months apart. "The EP works well as a companion piece to my memoir," he explains. "In the book, I'm looking retrospectively at my life and music, and it's those wanderings that made me think we should put this stuff out at roughly the same time."

Foundations' leadoff track, "A.F. Day," is the oldest of the bunch. "It's at least 25 or 30 years old," Tankian says. "It harks back to my disgust with indoctrination, which started in my youth — so it's got that punk-rock ethos. I kept the vocals the same, too, because they had this screamy sound in my tone that I no longer have as much. Sometimes I get complaints about that, but hey — your voice changes as you get older."

The single "Justice Will Shine On" is about Tankian's grandparents, who survived the Armenian genocide of 1915. (All of SOAD's grandparents were survivors.) "Parts of it are as old as 'A.F. Day,' but the chorus was added around 2014 or '15, when we were looking at releasing a few songs for the 100th commemoration of the genocide with System of a Down," he says.

Tankian also tells his grandparents' story in *Down With the System*. And while the book includes plenty of memories from SOAD's history, anyone looking for tales of backstage debauchery will be disappointed. "Touring stories, partying with this band or that band — a lot of that stuff I took away," he says, noting that his original manuscript was at least twice as long as the published version. "Even though it was exciting for the book, I took it away because I didn't feel comfortable sharing things about other people without their consent. I've been very respectful in terms of my storytelling because I think as an author, as a human being, if you don't first take responsibility for your own life before getting into other people and your interaction with them, it's not as effective, honest or powerful."

Though Tankian was born in Lebanon, he grew up in Los Angeles. He spends part of the year there and part of the year on his farm in New Zealand. When we speak with him, he's in L.A., where his organic coffee company, Kavat, recently opened its first café. "It's not just a coffee shop — it's a really nice gallery," he explains. "We have my art on the walls, and we're going to be doing exhibitions with artists and photographers — some from the music world, and some not. It's been an amazing experience, and very gratifying. Having people say, 'I love your coffee' is such a huge compliment for me because we've put a lot of time and money into coming up with our own roast, picking beans and the curation of the taste."

But perhaps the biggest news for Tankian fans this year is the fact that System of a Down played at the Sick New World festival in Las Vegas and a special one-off at Golden Gate Park in San Francisco with the Deftones. "We're looking at opportunities of doing 'event' type of shows rather than full tours," he says. "But it is something that I'm interested in continuing to do, and I think the guys are as well."

Considering Tankian's multi-hyphenate status as a musical icon, activist, author, painter and entrepreneur, we knew he'd be a perfect candidate for our Greatest Interview Ever franchise. To absolutely no one's surprise, he did not disappoint.

WHAT'S THE GREATEST SONG YOU'VE EVER WRITTEN?

SERJ TANKIAN I have no idea. The thing about my personality is, I don't have a favorite flavor of ice cream. I don't have a favorite food. I don't have a favorite movie. I don't have a favorite song of anyone's, including my own. My favorite is diversity. I like different things merging together in interesting ways. The more diverse, the more interesting it is for me — and that goes for food, colors, musicians, artists, whatever. Because the death of art is repetition. Repetition creates redundancy. How am I gonna rate a System of a Down song against another System of a Down song, or a ballad against a heavy song? "Prison Song" versus "Aerials" or one of my own songs? I don't know. It's impossible.

WHAT'S THE WORST SONG YOU'VE EVER WRITTEN? The worst song I've ever written I've never released. There's a lot of compositions where you're working through stuff. It's not complete, and it may never be complete. Or it's just an idea you thought was cool, but then you record it and think, Eh, I don't know. So, the worst song I've ever written is something that probably no one will ever hear.

WHAT'S THE SONG YOU'RE PROUDEST OF? I guess that might be either "Boom!" or "Prison Song" with System, just because they are both narrative, not lyrical. Instead of writing a traditional lyric, you're writing a paragraph and literally spewing it out in the song. Kinda like hip-hop, but not necessarily rhyming. I remember with "Boom!" — it was so conversational that we had to take the music out while I was recording the vocals, because you have a tendency to do things rhythmically as a singer, and we wanted it to be non-rhythmical. It was an interesting way to record.

WHAT'S THE CRAZIEST GIFT YOU'VE RECEIVED FROM A FAN? A piss jar. It was empty, thank God. But it had their name on it, like when you go to a doctor, along with their medical details. I just looked at it and said, "This is a piss jar." And they said, "Yes." Then I asked, "Is it sterilized?" And they said, "Yes, it's clean." So, I said, "Wonderful." I didn't even ask why they would give it to me. Obviously, I tossed it. But I thought it was creative.

WHAT'S THE GREATEST ALBUM THAT YOU DIDN'T LIKE AT FIRST, BUT NOW YOU LOVE IT? I know why you're asking that, because good music is usually not immediately imbibed. You want to listen to it multiple times, and at first, you're not sure what to make of it. Really good music is always like that — and I'm hoping that our music also falls under that quality. For me, it's maybe the Tom Waits record *Swordfishtrombones*. The first time you hear him, you're like, "What the hell is this?" And then you're like, "Oh my God, this is incredible." His stories and vocals are great. I'm a huge Tom Waits fan. But when I first heard him, I didn't know what to make of it. But I think good music takes processing. Frank Zappa is another one like that. Some people just don't get his music, but I think he's incredible.

WHAT'S BEEN YOUR GREATEST SUCCESS SO FAR? Telling my grandfather's story. It's in "Justice Will Shine On" [from *Foundations*,] it's in my book and it's in the [2006] documentary *Screamers* [starring System of a Down]. It's basically a story of survival from the Armenian genocide. What [System] achieved with awareness for this cause that is so near and dear to us — because all of our grandparents are survivors — I think it's one of the single strongest achievements we've made as a band.

WHAT'S YOUR BIGGEST REGRET? Not investing in Apple. [*Laughs*] No, I'm just kidding. I don't ponder on regrets, because I feel like every step you make has taken you where you are today. And if you didn't make those steps, including the mistakes, you wouldn't be exactly who you are today. I had a software company in the Nineties that I sold for pennies on the dollar because I wanted to get out and do music. I was running it as a way to have my own business, not work for anyone else, and still have time to do music. If I had kept that company, it would've been very successful because it was a thriving vertical market. So, that might be a regret.

WHAT'S THE GREATEST LIVE BAND YOU'VE EVER SEEN? Ooh, that's tough. There are many great live bands that I *haven't* seen. [*Laughs*] But one of the best concerts I've been to was Roger Waters doing *The Wall*. I saw it in New Zealand while we were there.

WHAT'S THE MOST ROCK-STAR THING YOU'VE EVER PURCHASED? This is tough because I don't purchase rock-star things, unlike people I know. [*Laughs*] I don't know… a nice house? My purchases are not very exciting. I'm way too cerebral for luxury purchases. I have a nice car, but it's not a pimp ride or anything like that. I'm wearing a $20 iFIT watch right now, and it's better than any Rolex because that shit doesn't monitor your heart rate or your steps. So, I guess my biggest rock-star purchase would be my farm in New Zealand. We have a beautiful farm where we live part of the year. I enjoy natural living. We compost and we have our own water well and… The more I talk about it, the less rock star it sounds.

WHAT DO YOU CONSIDER TO BE YOUR GREATEST ACHIEVEMENT AS AN ACTIVIST? I guess it would be the same answer as my greatest achievement in general: Spreading awareness of the Armenian genocide. But it's not just a historical event in terms of people's knowledge. It's important to note that genocide occurs today. There's no real agreement towards stopping genocide. We have the Geneva Convention, a United Nations genocide convention, but it doesn't have teeth. There's no monitoring, no organization that makes sure that all countries cease and desist from aiding a genocide. Most countries tend to aid their political allies, regardless of whether a genocide is being committed.

WHAT'S THE BEST SHOW YOU'VE EVER PLAYED? 2015 in Republic Square, Yerevan, Armenia. System of a Down was invited to play the 100th anniversary of the Armenian genocide. It was April 23rd, and it was raining hard. They say it always rains hard the day before the genocide commemoration. We had 50,000 fans just going off. The show felt incredible because it was not just a show. It was an event paying homage to our ancestors and our own grandparents for their miraculous survival, criticizing governments for their lack of recognition of obvious history. It was just so many things at once. It was the pinnacle, the top of the mountain for System of a Down. It felt as if we were created for that moment.

WHAT'S BEEN YOUR MOST EMBARRASSING ONSTAGE MOMENT? On one of my birthdays, we were in Pittsburgh playing a show. In the early days of System, I'd have a drink or a smoke before going onstage — it would loosen me up and I'd be fine. Then I stopped smoking pot for a long period of time. On that birthday, Daron [Malakian] called me onto his bus and said, "Bro, let's have a bong hit together before the show." He regrets that bong hit forever at this point, because I got *really* stoned. I got so stoned that I heard all of our music as dance music when we got onstage. I couldn't decipher the songs from each other, so therefore I didn't know the lyrics to any of the songs. It was the fucking most embarrassing show ever. They'd be playing a ballad and I'd be screaming. Then they'd play a heavy song and I'd be mumbling — to the point where the audience were asking me to please not forget the lyrics to the next song. And anytime I would go to one of the guys for help with the lyrics, I'd see them mouthing the lyrics but not hear them — and then I'd just start laughing. But I was so stoned that I didn't give a shit. Afterward, I felt bad for the band and the crowd. The band had never been so disappointed.

WHO'S THE TOUGHEST BAND TO OPEN FOR? Slayer, hands down. No one on the planet is as scary to open for as Slayer. When we opened for them, their fans were giving us the death sign.

"David Bowie was the nicest guy. I also met the Dalai Lama, and He had the same look on his face: non-judgmental innocence."
— Serj Tankian

WHAT'S THE MOST STARSTRUCK YOU'VE EVER BEEN? David Bowie. I met him twice. I have a picture of him and I, shaking hands backstage at Roseland in New York. He had played a show there, and I met him afterwards. He was the nicest guy. I met him again in Los Angeles [in 2004] after his show at the Greek Theatre. I remember Daron was with me as well. David had this look on his face that was like this kind of beautiful innocence. I also met the Dalai Lama in Philadelphia, and that was a starstruck moment as well. He had the same look on his face as Bowie, this kind of non-judgmental innocence.

WHO'S THE GREATEST METAL SINGER EVER? I would have to say Ozzy. I mean, it's hard *not* to say Ozzy.

WHAT'S THE GREATEST NU-METAL ALBUM? I'm gonna have to say Korn's first record, because it seems like that was the time that the term "nu-metal" was created. I actually think people don't think of System of a Down as nu-metal. But Korn, for sure.

WHAT'S THE WORST SHOW YOU'VE EVER PLAYED? There's a couple of them. I've toured in many different capacities: with System, with an orchestra, and solo with a backup band. One of my worst shows was in Atlanta with the Atlanta Symphony Orchestra. In fairness to them, orchestras in the U.S. don't get a lot of preparation time for modern compositions. Whereas in Europe, they give you some time to actually work through the material, so it turns out way better. But we did the Atlanta show with just a soundcheck, and they just couldn't get it down. It was a fucking disaster. To add to that, we had a very rock-oriented audience with beer cans pounding the stage for System songs — while these 80-year-olds were trying to get through their violin solos. It was so horrible it was funny. Afterwards, my touring pianist, Erwin Khachikian, had this confounded look on his face and goes, "They're uncivilized!" [*Laughs*] But I'm thankful for the experience, because I'll never forget that day.

WHAT'S THE WILDEST THING YOU'VE SEEN IN THE CROWD AT ONE OF YOUR SHOWS? I've seen fires, that's pretty wild. I've seen pits like you wouldn't believe in Germany. A photographer friend of ours took a video, and it looked like some kind of cosmic thing going on.

WHAT'S THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE BETWEEN LIVING IN LOS ANGELES AND LIVING IN NEW ZEALAND? Frequency of life. L.A. is a big city, so everything is happening at a much faster rate. New Zealand is at a much slower, natural rate, based on our heart and our existence. The land is clean, the water is clean, the air is clean. The air here in L.A. is definitely *not* clean. [*Laughs*] I call it "air shit." When we're flying into L.A., I think to myself, Ladies and gentlemen, we're landing in air shit. [*Laughs*] So, there's a huge difference. But I like the balance of both. I like speeding up in L.A. and slowing down in New Zealand.

WHAT'S THE GREATEST DREAM, MUSICAL OR OTHERWISE, THAT YOU HAVE YET TO ACHIEVE? Most of what I've achieved I only partially dreamed up. I come up with new things that I want to achieve all the time, but there's no long-term vision that I haven't already brought into reality. I come up with new things to bring into reality to keep me on my toes and keep me interested. But I can't say, "I would've loved to write a song with this person," or anything like that. Wait, OK... Here's one: I've scored movies and TV shows, but I haven't scored a blockbuster — whatever that means. That'd be fun to do.

L. COHEN/WIREIMAGE

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